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Does the Arab Film Festival in Sydney support the social acceptance of the Arabic community in Australia?

- Bachelorarbeit -

Hochschule Mittweida – University of Applied Science (FH)

Hemsbach, 2010

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Hochschule Mittweida – University of Applied Science (FH)

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Review

This Bachelor thesis is focusing on the question of whether the Arab Film Festival in Sydney supports the social acceptance of the Arabic community in Australia. To answer this question, the situation of the Arabic community in Australia is explained and presented in the beginning. This is followed by a closer look at the Muslim community and their part of building Australia's cultural diversity. Also, the difficult process at integration, which is constrained by the negative image of the Arabic World and portrayed throughout the Western media, is presented.

The main focus of this thesis is on how the Arab Film Festival is addressing the problems and struggles Arab Australians have had to face ever since the "War on Terror", which has especially emerged from the involvement of terrorists of Arabic origin in the attacks on September 11 on the United States of America in 2001. This annual festival is an event for the Arabic community and gives an interesting insight for all Australians to understand this diverse culture. Previous editions of the festival will be examined, with a close look at the program, audiences, funding and statistical reports. With the help of these statistics and the annual reports of the festival over the past years, the question of whether the Arab Film Festival is successful in achieving more social acceptance in Australia will be answered.

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List of Abbreviations

AFF	Arab Film Festival
SAFF	Sydney Arab Film Festival
ICE	International Cultural Exchange
FTO	New South Wales Film and Television Office
NSW	New South Wales
CBD	Central Business District
PCC	Parramatta City Council
LBC	Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation
ART	Arabic Radio and Television
SBS	Special Broadcasting Service
ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
DoFAaT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DoIMIA	Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs
DoIC	Department Immigration and Citizenship
ALHSV	Australian Lebanese Historical Society of Victoria
VIC	Victoria
QLD	Queensland
ADC	American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee
CRC	Community Relations Commission
SMH	Sydney Morning Herald

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Implementation of the subject

Ever since the Gulf War in 1990, the terrorist attacks on September 11 in 2001 and the recent wars on terror in Afghanistan and Iraq, Arabs and especially Muslims around the globe had to face struggles against racism, prejudice and misconceptions. This struggle is mainly based on the negative stereotypes that are projected in the media. Adding to their bad image is the lack of education and knowledge by the majority of Western societies, making a social acceptance in society a huge challenge for the Arabic culture.

This thesis focuses on Australia and Sydney in particular, which states the highest proportion of Arab Australian inhabitants and is the most multicultural city in the country. In this diverse and vibrant metropolis the annual Arab Film Festival has taken center stage since its inception in 2001, addressing not only problems and struggles in Arabic countries like Lebanon, Iraq or Egypt but is also working towards acceptance, understanding and recognition of the Arabic culture within Australia's society. With ongoing support throughout the community and the New South Wales government, the festival has developed from a local to a nation-wide event, reaching out to all Arab Australians and non Arab Australians across the country. The author himself has worked for the Arab Film Festival in 2009 as part of his practical work experience and his study-based internship. He worked closely with the festival staff and got an excellent insight into the industry, the Arabic film culture and the community. With this work experience, his travel and cultural knowledge about Australia, he approached this thesis with first hand knowledge. Australia's rich and dynamic cultural diversity is facing times of prejudice and racial tensions, which reflect on the lives of Arabic communities in terms of acceptance, trust and socializing in general.

"You turn on the news every night and there is a story involving someone from an Arabic-speaking country background that is gang related or drug related - nothing but ugly stories. We want to put diverse stories out there so the broader Australian community can understand that not all Arabs are fundamentalists, or even Muslim," said festival co-director Mouna Zaylah in an interview with the Sun-Herald newspaper before the 2009 edition of the AFF (Sun-Herald article, 2009). So what can be done against these bad stereotypes and images in a Western media dominated society? The Arab Film Festival's diverse program and forums present a platform of interactive exchange and cultural education for all Australians and foreigners, young and old, as well as Arabic or not Arabic. With the launch of the national tour in 2009 the festival is addressing the issues of the Arabic culture across the whole country and, with a defined political point of view, is also taking an educational and political stand. So does the Arab Film Festival in Sydney support the social acceptance of the Arabic community in Australia?

1.2 Structure of Thesis

This Bachelor thesis is dealing with the question of whether the Arab Film Festival in Sydney does support social acceptance of the Arabic community in Australia. To answer this question, many statistics and numbers from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, data from different publications of varied departments of the Australian government, as well as the festival's company-internal information have been evaluated. In the beginning the current situation of the Arabic and in particular the Muslim community in Australia is commented on with a closer look on the cultural diversity and differences. This is followed by the difficult process and attempts of integration, which based on prejudice, racism and distrust towards the Arabic people, has suffered due to recent riots and conflicts. Another point that is being examined is the struggle of Arab Australians and their dual identity crisis emerging from the negative stereotypes that are being projected in the Western media. Thereafter the Arab Film Festival itself and its diverse programs, aims and ambitions, target audiences, political funding as well as a close look on the past editions of the festivals are examined and presented.

The actual main focus of this paper is how the Arab Film Festival is addressing the struggles and misconceptions of the Arabic community, based on the negative image that Arabic people have been tagged with. It focuses on the cultural diversity of Australia, as it has been a country of immigration that was built on a multicultural foundation, which now needs to realize the importance and ethnic contribution of the Arabic community. Arabic people all across Australia and especially Sydney and Melbourne, where a lot of them have settled down, face desperate times as they find themselves caught between two cultures. This identity crisis is one of the major aspects the Arab Film Festival is counteracting with a variety of films and programs, as they contribute their part to gain more social acceptance and understanding of a culture that is drenched in dispute.

CHAPTER 2

ARABIC CULTURE IN AUSTRALIA

This chapter is focusing on Arab Australians and their heritage, migration history, community and social acceptance process in Australia and particularly New South Wales. It shows the developments of the first settlers from the Arabic World coming to Australia and the significant migration waves after World War 2. This is examined until today's situation, which is enormously affected by the difficult process of social acceptance, based on distrust and prejudice towards Arabic and especially the Muslim religion and culture. On the other hand it also takes a look at the negative stereotype image of Muslims, which is projected throughout the media in the Western World. This seems to be due to a lack of knowledge and understanding by reporters and correspondents. Ever since the terrorist September 11 attacks on the United States and the War on Afghanistan and Iraq, Arabs and particularly Muslims have to face a difficult situation all over the world, facing distrust and racist confrontations. It is necessary to examine different aspects of the Arabic culture in Australia to understand the current situation the Arab Film Festival has to face in terms of their aims and ambitions.

2.1 Introduction of Arab Australians

Arab Australians are Australian citizens or residents of Arabic culture and linguistic heritage and/or identity whose ancestry traces back to any of the various waves of immigrants originating from one of the 22 countries, which comprise the Arabic world. The 22 countries of the Arabic World are Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestinian Authority, Qatar, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen (ADC, 2010).

In terms of religion, the overseas-born Arab Australians are mainly Christian. As many as 90.4 percent of the Egyptian-born living in Australia are Christian, with sizeable majorities from Lebanon with 60.1 percent and Iraq 79.1 percent (Batrouney 2002, 39). Due to wars and civil strife in the Middle East, immigrant flows have been significantly been affected. The Lebanese presence has been established through three successive waves over the last 100 years. The impact of these waves can be seen in the Lebanese-born population, which stood at 70,325 persons in the 1996 census (Batrouney 2002, 39). The different historical periods in which those waves occurred, affected the religious composition of these immigrants. The first two waves were predominantly Christian, while the third was predominantly Muslim. Nowadays Muslims constitute 38.6 per-

cent of the Lebanese-born persons in Australia (Batrouney 2002, 39). In comparison, Catholics account for 40 percent of the Lebanese-born in Australia, including Maronites with 30 percent (Batrouney 2002, 39). Over decades the Lebanese community has taken many forms within Australia. According to the 1996 Census, 96 percent of the Lebanese-born have taken up the Australian citizenship. However, the issue of identity is not that simple, as many Lebanese-Australians wish to retain elements of their Lebanese identity at the same time as they acquire an Australian identity.

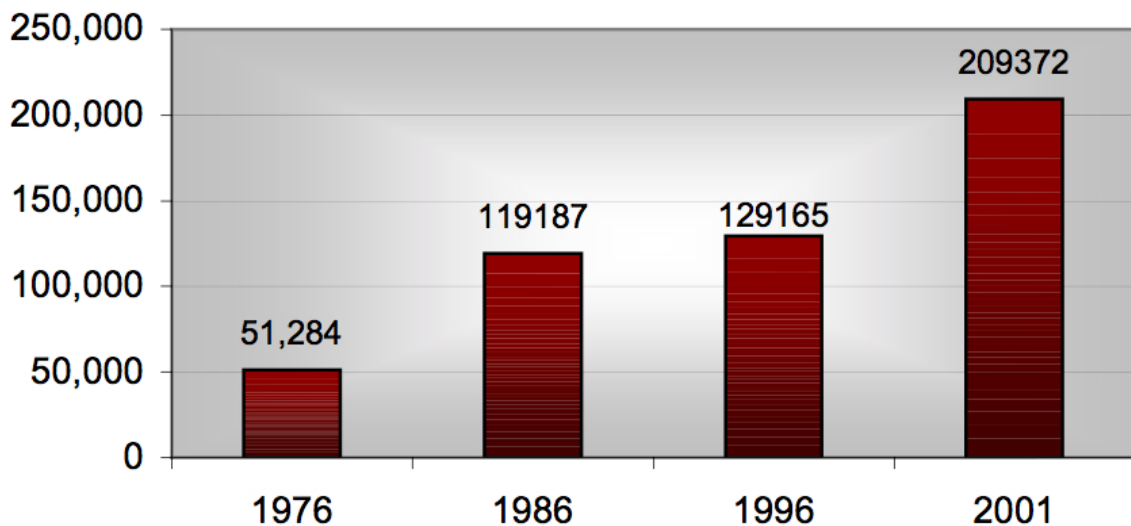
The Egyptian-born who settled in the early part of the 20th century were from European countries such as Italy and Greece, as were many of the first-wave settlers after World War 2. So almost three-quarters of all Egyptian-born persons in Australia had settled before 1976, which accounted for 63.1 percent before 1971 (Batrouney 2002, 40). As most other immigrants from the Middle East, the Egyptians have a high rate of acquiring the Australian citizenship. It is very interesting that even though 90 percent of the population in Egypt itself is Muslim, the great majority of Egyptian-born Australians are Christians with 90 percent (Batrouney 2002, 39). Coptic Orthodox churches have been established, particularly in Sydney and Melbourne. The number of Palestinians in Australia was estimated at about 10,000 to 15,000 in 2002, with most coming from the Gaza strip, Lebanon, Syria, Kuwait and other countries of the Arabian Peninsula (Batrouney 2002, 41). This migration has been closely linked to the contemporary events in Palestine and consisted of small waves in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. Early arrivals were mainly Christians, while later arrivals had significantly high proportions of Muslims.

It is most significant to note that in New South Wales, Arabic was the most spoken language other than English, which represented 2.1 percent of the population in 1996 (Hornberger). Still there are different colloquial languages and cultural specificities throughout the countries of the Arabic World. There are approximately 431,000 Arab Australians in the Commonwealth of Australia from which the majority originates from Lebanon, Palestine/Israel, Jordan, Egypt, Iraq and Morocco (Hornberger). By far the largest group of Arab Australians is the Lebanese numbering around 199,640, which is almost 1 percent of the population (Census quick stats, 2006). Sydney is also located in Australia's biggest state, New South Wales, where Arabic is the main spoken language after English and is also the second main language spoken nationwide by 0- to 14 -year-olds (Hornberger). The Arabic language has a big impact on language education, political and social change and the effects of global developments in media, technology and travel. Since New South Wales and in particular Sydney's population is so rich in Arabic culture and influence, it sets the ideal stage for the Arab Film Festival.

The chart below shows the immense growth of the Arabic speaking communities in Australia from the late 1970's until 2001 as the numbers have quadrupled in size (The case of Arab Australian students in contemporary Australia, 2005). Unfortunately, this growth does not mean that social and economic indicators have improved. Income levels of Arab Australians fall well below national average and, with the ongoing impact of the

“War on Terror” especially the young generation is experiencing social and cultural marginalization by increased racism and exclusion.

Chart 1: Growth of Arab speaking communities in Australia 1976-2001



Deakin University

2.2 Australia's ethnic and religious diversity

To understand the situation in Australia concerning its cultural diversity and the immigrant situation, it is important to take a closer look at its increasing diversity in both ethnic and religious aspects. At the dawn of the new millennium, Australia faced a more diverse population than ever according to the 2001 census results:

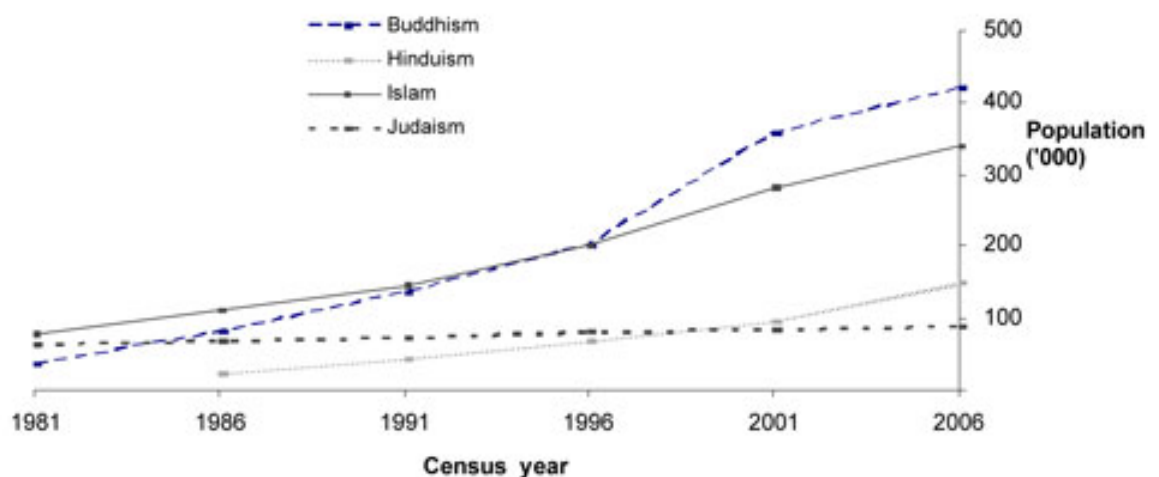
"A five percent growth in overseas-born residents arriving since the 1996 census led to a slight decline in the proportion of Australian-born residents to three quarters of the entire population. The United Kingdom led the flow as the birthplace of 5.5 percent of the population, followed by New Zealand (1.9 percent), Italy (1.2 percent), and China and Vietnam (0.8 percent each). In addition, 6.3 percent of the population was born in Asia, North Africa, or the Middle East." (Australia's increasing ethnic and religious diversity, 2002)

Australia has always been a country of immigrants but with over 15 percent of the population having been born outside English-speaking-countries, many now do not even speak English at home. Instead, the most common languages spoken at home are Chi-

nese, Italian, Greek and, of course, also Arabic (Australia's increasing ethnic and religious diversity, 2002). This is quite an impressive number, which also indicates how many immigrants remain true to their cultural beliefs, traditions and heritage. This trend is eventually resulting in bilingualism. The “concept of diversity” states that a critical distance is made to the assumption, that the national and ethnic assignment is the attribute for social progress as well as the individual identification. Rather, it is the understanding of relevant categories like age, sex, sexual orientation, physical and mental health, religion, speech and social class and it is as well assumed that they are overlapping and influence each other (Scherr 2009, 83).

Looking at the 2001 Census, 35.9 percent of the population claimed Australian ancestry. Over 65 percent of the population though claimed various European ancestries and in the community only 1.9 percent referred to their North African and Middle Eastern origins, 0.9 percent of whom were mainly Lebanese (Australia's increasing ethnic and religious diversity, 2002). Another element adding to Australia's diversity is that it has no official state religion and people are free to practice any religion they choose, as long as they obey the law. Therefore the number of non-Christian religions has increased. An enormous number of 79 percent state the growth of Buddhists in the years from 1997 till 2001, due to immigration flows. Buddhists account for 1.9 percent of the population, followed by Muslims with 1.5 percent (Australia's increasing ethnic and religious diversity, 2002). Muslims have a considerable number of followers in a Christian dominated society as the following chart and table show.

Chart 2: Religious diversity in Australia



Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Table 1: Major religious affiliations 1996 and 2006

Major religious affiliations—Census figures 1996 and 2006					
Religion	1996 ('000)	%	2006 ('000)	%	1996–2006 (change %)
<i>Christian</i>	12 582.8	70.9	12 685.8	63.9	0.8
Catholic	4 799.0	27.0	5 126.9	25.8	6.8
Anglican	3 903.3	22.0	3 718.2	18.7	-4.7
Uniting Church	1 334.9	7.5	1 135.4	5.7	-14.9
Presbyterian and Reformed	675.5	3.8	596.7	3.0	-11.7
Eastern Orthodox	497.0	2.8	544.2	2.7	9.5
<i>Non-Christian</i>	616.4	3.5	1 105.1	5.6	79.3
Buddhism	199.8	1.1	418.8	2.1	109.6
Islam	200.9	1.1	340.4	1.7	69.4
Hinduism	67.3	0.4	148.1	0.7	120.2
Judaism	79.8	0.4	88.8	0.4	11.3
<i>No religion</i>	2 948.9	16.6	3 706.6	18.7	25.7
<i>Not stated</i>	1 550.6	8.7	2 224.0	11.2	43.4

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics Census figures

2.3 The Muslim communities in Australia

In the late 1950s the “White Australian Policy” was dismantled, allowing the entry of many non-Europeans who expanded Australia’s religious diversity. One particularly prominent one has been the Islam, which has visibly integrated into Australia’s multi-faith and multicultural society. Many Australian cities have mosques, offices of Islamic organizations and Islamic schools, underlining the fact that Islam is the fastest growing religion in the country, with almost 70 percent growth between 1996 and 2006 (table 1: Major religious affiliations 1996 and 2006).

Muslim communities in Australia come from a wide range of religious traditions and have cultural as well as ethnic values, drawn from more than 120 countries. Thereby Muslims practice their religious and cultural traditions according to their individual countries and regions. This diversity among Muslim Australians is based on post-World War 2 national mass immigration program. Over the last 30 years, Australia has seen a steep increase in the growth of Muslim population across the country and there are distinct cities and suburbs in which Muslims found their homes. According to the Religion and Cultural Diversity Resource Manual by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, the Sydney suburb Auburn consist of 36 percent and the

Melbourne suburb of Meadow Heights 33 percent of Muslims (Muslim Australians, 2004). This is demonstrating their presence in Australia's two biggest cities. In addition, 79 percent of Arab Australians obtained the Australian Citizenship (Muslim Australians, 2004). Today there are more than 360,000 people in Australia identified as Muslims, of whom more than one third was born in Australia (Muslim Australians, 2004). The following two tables show the presence of the Muslim Australians throughout Australia. Table 2 shows the significant Muslim numbers of the country of birth by selected areas, where the religious affiliation is identified as Islam. Although this is just an abridgment of the original top 20 list, the first four local government areas are stated in New South Wales. This demonstrates the significant presence of Muslim Australians in the state, where the Arab Film Festival was initialized and has been held for many years. Table 3 shows the number of Muslim Australians in each Australian state using and comparing the 2001 and 2006 Census data of population and housing.

Table 2: Muslims in local government area

Bankstown - NSW	25,996
Auburn - NSW	16,111
Liverpool - NSW	13,740
Parramatta - NSW	12,120
Brisbane - QLD	10,868
Moreland - VIC	10,618

Department of Immigration and Citizenship

Table 3: Australian Muslim populations by State/Territory

Australian State	Census 2001	Census 2006
New South Wales	140,907	168,786
Victoria	92,742	109,370
Western Australia	19,456	24,186
Queensland	14,990	20,321
South Australia	7,478	10,517
Australian Capital Territory	3,488	4,373
Northern Territory	945	1,089
Tasmania	865	1,050
Other Territories	707	700
Total	281,578	340,392

Department of Immigration and Citizenship

This steady increase of the Muslim population is due to immigration, though high birth rates from within Australia have contributed as well to its growing number. The table below from the Australian Department of Immigration and Citizenship using 2001 Census data shows how the Muslim birth rate in Australia itself is a significant factor in Muslim population growth.

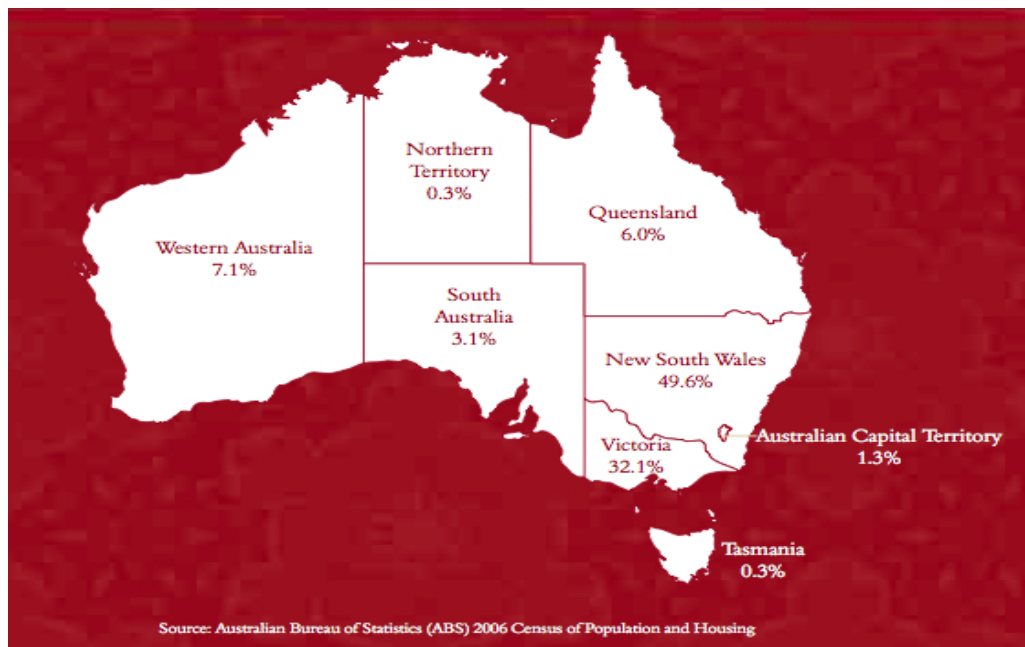
Table 4: Australian Muslims – country/region of origin

Australia	128,906
Lebanon	30,290
Turkey	23,125
Afghanistan	15,961
Pakistan	13,820
Bangladesh	13,358
Iraq	10,038
Indonesia	8,656
Other	96,235

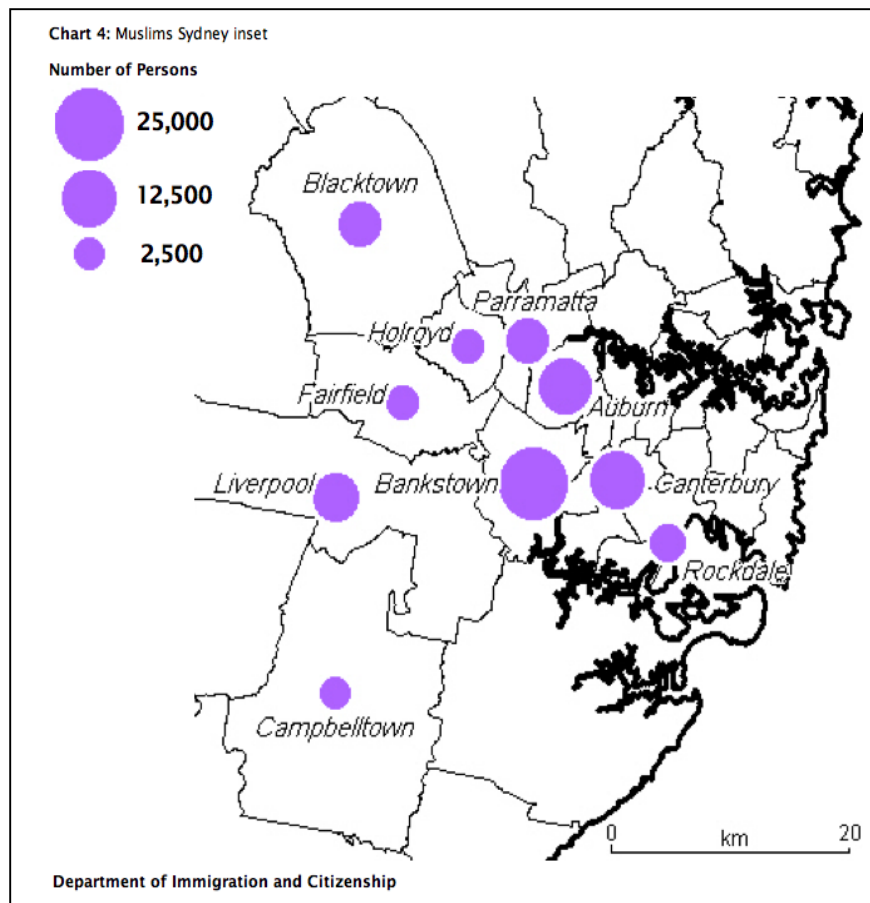
Department of Immigration and Citizenship

According to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, more than 80 percent of Muslims in Australia speak English or at least are proficient in English. As mentioned earlier, 15 percent of Australia's population does not speak English at home but looking at the Muslim Australians, even 86 percent speak a language other than English at home (Muslim Australians and local government, 2008). This is a significant number and shows how diverse Australia is and how much several communities still practice their culture and traditions while adjusting into the broader society. Still only one third of Muslim Australians speak Arabic, followed by Turkish, with almost 14 percent, and Urdu with 5.3 percent (Muslim Australians and local government, 2008).

Chart 3: Muslims in Australia



Like most migrants, Muslims came to Australia for a number of reasons, such as economic advantages, educational opportunities or escaping political oppression in their homeland. In fact, most Muslims came to Australia because the society is based on a number of important values such as democracy, the rule of law and being generally open and friendly. Australia gives people the freedom to practice, teach and even propagate their religion. However, not all immigrants are the same in religious matters



and are much more diverse. On one hand there are some immigrants from Islamic monocultures such as Afghanistan, Pakistan or Syria. On the other hand a lot of them arrived from countries like Albania, Lebanon or Nigeria and are culturally and religiously diverse. This means that Muslims can't be categorized as one homogenized group. Sydney and Melbourne are the two cities where the majority of Muslim immigrants

have been settling, due to cheap accommodations, the higher chance to find work and simply to connect with other groups with the same ethnic backgrounds. In Sydney, the Muslim communities are concentrated around four local government areas: Auburn, Bankstown, Canterbury and Liverpool. In fact, 50 percent of the Muslim immigrants settled in Sydney and 23 percent in Melbourne, according to the 1991 Census.

Over several years, friends of families followed, resulting into a close settlement. Family and community bonds have been important for Muslims to immigrate, to receive support during settlement, to re-establish their traditional social world and eventually to obtain the Australian citizenship. In the year 2004, 37.9 percent of Australia's current Muslim population was born in Australia and on the other hand many others came at a very young age and grew up in Australia (Muslim Australians, 2004). They see them-

selves as Australians and it is the country where they want to go to school and university, find a job and make careers and establish a home for their family. They want to make Muslim and non-Muslim friends and live in harmony with Islam and Australian values. Muslims play an important part in Australia's multicultural society and they are given unlimited freedom to practice or teach their beliefs, cults, traditions and religion. So the issue is not whether Australia is a Muslim majority country or not; it is whether they have equal rights and responsibilities with others.

Living as the minority, such as in Australia, is nothing new for Muslims, even though most Muslims live in Muslim-majority countries like Indonesia, Pakistan, Iran, Egypt or Turkey, many live as minorities in different countries across the world. Throughout history Muslims have often lived as the minority for long periods of time but looking at Australia and the Western world in general, they now face a different challenge. It is the difficult process of adjusting to the Western values and traditions in context with the Islamic norms. In this point they are not different to many other Australian citizens, whose families have immigrated from all over the world. Furthermore Muslims in Australia have remarkably adjusted their lifestyles, thinking and practices to the Australian context and its basic values and systems (Muslim Australians and local government, 2008).

It cannot be denied that several Muslims do not fit in easily and are not too comfortable with the idea of adjustment, since requirements of Islam stand in contrast with the requirements of loyalty to Australia. In a Muslim-majority country where the religion of Islam is well established, it is natural for the society to reflect the norms and values of the religion. For Muslims who live as minorities, it is their duty to implement Islamic norms and values in their individual lives as best they can. The implementation of religion on an individual level can be very important to many Muslims living in Australia, but for many it is more a matter of cultural identity. Overall they need to negotiate between the Islamic traditions and modern Australian society.

2.4 Muslim migration history Australia

In order to understand and appreciate the context of Muslims in Australia, some preliminary remarks on migration history may be useful. Muslims in Australia have a long and varied history that is thought to pre-date European settlement. Some of Australia's earliest visitors were Muslims from the east Indonesian archipelago. They made contact with mainland Australia as early as the 16th and 17th centuries. It was Muslim sailors and fishermen from Makassar, in present day Indonesia, who used to make annual trips to the northern coast of Australia in search of fishing grounds. In the course of these

ventures close personal, social and economic relations with the Aboriginal people in Australia's north were established. Muslim immigrants from coastal Africa and island territories under the rule of the British Empire came to Australia as sailors and convicts in the early fleets of European settlers during the late 1700s (Our People, 2008). The first significant semi-permanent Muslim population was formed with the arrival of Afghan cameleers drivers in Melbourne in the 1800s. One distinguished feature about these Muslim Afghans is that like the Lebanese Muslims of today, they lived as minority communities within an Anglo social, cultural, economic and political context. Small numbers of Muslims were also recruited from Dutch and British colonies in South-East Asia to work in the Australian pearling industry in the late 19th and early 20th century (Our People, 2008).

A distinguished impact of Muslim immigration on Australia's modern-day Muslim population was World War 2, where the numbers significantly increased. This mass immigration program was initiated by the Australian government to recruit immigrants for national development. The government and businesses realized that they needed to grow economically and demographically in order to be part of the post-war development. Australia needed a large number of migrant workers to fulfill their ambitions in times where Australia was developing into a capitalistic society, which had the required preconditions, financial and political structure as well as the natural resources. The first Muslims arriving in significant numbers in Australia during the 1950s and 1960s were the Turkish Cypriots, followed by Turkish immigrants between 1968 and 1972. Examining the years in between 1947 and 1971, the Muslim population increased from just 2,704 to 22,311 (Muslim Australians and local government, 2008). Looking at the Turkish population today, the 2006 census states that there were 23,126 Turkish-born Muslims in Australia. Another significant group of Muslim immigrants in terms of economic impact were the Bosnian and Kosovo Muslims. They arrived in the 1960s and due to their role in the construction of the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electricity Scheme in New South Wales, made an important contribution to modern-day Australia. A large number of the Lebanese migrants also started arriving in Australia, due to the outbreak of the civil war in Lebanon in 1975. The 2006 census states that there were 7,542 Muslim Australians born in Bosnia Herzegovina and 30,287 born in Lebanon (Muslim Australians and local government, 2008). The census also shows there were more than 340,000 Muslims in Australia, of whom 128,904 were born in Australia and the balance born overseas. The rapid increase in the Muslim population is due to their comparatively high birth rates (Muslim Australians and local government, 2008). If this trend continues, the Muslim communities will play an important factor in Australia's social, economic and political reality.

2.5 Lebanese Australians

Lebanese Australians began arriving in Australia in the 1880s and were affected by the discriminatory immigration policies, which culminated in the severe restriction of the “White Australia Policy”. In this period, Lebanese immigrants established small businesses trying to fit in. Larger numbers started to arrive during the Second World War, due to Australia’s immigration program, and again in the 1970’s after a series of destabilizing conflicts around Lebanon. These included the Arab-Israeli War of 1967, the outbreak of the civil war in Lebanon in 1975-1976 and the major Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1978 and 1982 (Convy/ Monsour, 2008). While personal reasons for migration to Australia may have been different across individuals, many came in search of not only vocational or financial security, but also the very important civil security. Not only the opportunity to find work, but also the social stability and relative peace of mind, made Australia attractive for immigration. Not unlike migrants from across the world, many have come to Australia with the general intention to return to their homeland one day. However, in the process of this settlement many had to reconcile their own expectations with those of their children, who have lived most or all of their lives in Australia. Even though the presence of the Lebanese has not always been recognized, they have a long history of migration and have contributed to the state of NSW.

“Despite extensive legislative discrimination, the Lebanese immigrants were intent on being settlers, not sojourners, and sought to contribute positively to the new society as full and active citizens. As permanent settlers, Lebanese Australians adapted institutions and cultural practices from the old country to local conditions.” (Convy/ Monsour, 2008)

The 2006 census states the large numbers and from this resulting influence of Lebanese Australians in New South Wales, as 72.8 percent of the recorded 74,848 Lebanese-born people in Australia are living in Sydney, which is 2.3 percent of Sydney’s population. According to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, there are 30,290 Muslim Lebanese in Australia and the table below shows how many are located in each Australian State (Mapping Muslims in Australia, 2006).

Table 5: Lebanese Muslim Australians by State

State	Number of Lebanese Muslim Australians	Percent of total population
New South Wales	22,630	13.4 %
Victoria	6,358	5.8 %
Queensland	356	1.8 %
South Australia	304	2.9 %
Western Australia	421	1.7 %
Tasmania	24	2.3 %
Northern Territory	12	1.1 %
Capital Territory	185	4.2 %

Department of Immigration and Citizenship

Today the problem is that many Lebanese-born Australians are unemployed, which is resulting in family problems including poverty, domestic violence and intergenerational conflicts. These recent trends of course affect the opinion of many people throughout the Australian society and are not favorable to social acceptance or integration. There are the Australian Lebanese Associations, which are long established organizations and serve as umbrella organizations for the Lebanese communities in various states. They are recognized by the Lebanese government and serve it as the representative of the Lebanese community across Australia. Over the years many Lebanese bodies have been established to promote welfare, cultural or sporting activities and also to provide service for the youth and women of the community (Lebanese in Australia, 2000)

2.6 Australian Multiculturalism

By the 1970s Australia was moving from being essentially a monocultural society to becoming a multicultural one. Not only had its population become much more multicultural than it was in the 1940s, but its public policy developed in response to the shift. The election of the Whitlam Labor Government in 1972 was accompanied by a change in official ideology towards immigration. For instance, in 1973 it was proclaimed that future immigration policy would not distinguish between immigrants on the basis of race, color or nationality. Although Lebanese were not officially designated as refugees, special arrangements were made in 1976, to resettle persons in Australia displaced by the civil war in Lebanon. So by the mid-1970s the Australian governments had adopted a policy of multiculturalism. This idea was based on the notion that ethnic communities are legitimate and consistent with an Australian citizenship as long as certain principles are adhered to. This, for example, would include the respect for basic institutions and democratic values. This is the most recent cultural transformation Australia has seen, due to immigration (Batrouney 2002, 51). In 1989 the National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia had been defined as follows (Batrouney 2002, 52):

- ◆ **Cultural identity:** the right of all Australians, within carefully defined limits, to express and share their individual cultural heritage, including their language and religion;
- ◆ **Social justice:** the right of all Australians to equality of treatment and opportunity, and the removal of barriers of race, ethnicity, culture, religion, language, gender or place of birth;
- ◆ **Economic efficiency:** the need to maintain, develop and utilize effectively the skills and talents of all Australians, regardless of background.

These rights were balanced by three further propositions: that all Australians should have an overriding and unifying commitment to Australia; that all Australians accept the basic structures and principles of Australian society; and that multicultural policies involve a reciprocal responsibility to accept the rights of others to express their views and values (Batrouney 2002, 52). Still there is some controversy as to whether Australia is a country of tribes or a country that has been successfully managing cultural diversity and, at the same time, maintaining social cohesion.

Australia's growing diversity is most evident in Sydney, the largest and multicultural city in the country. Sydney has a population of 4.5 million and its economic power and position ensures that it is the major destination for long-term migrants, as an impressive one-third of Sydney's population is foreign born. In fact there are 60.4 percent of the population who were born in Australia and the five most common countries, other than Australia, are England with 3.5 percent, China with 2.6 percent, New Zealand with 2.0 percent, Vietnam with 1.5 percent and also Lebanon with 1.3 percent (City of Sydney, 2010).

Lebanese Arabic is also the second most non-English language spoken followed by Chinese languages, mostly Cantonese and Mandarin, as immigrants account for 75 percent of Sydney's annual population growth. Looking at the numbers of university degrees, only 12.8 percent Australian-born had university-level education and in comparison 16.3 percent of graduates, who were born overseas, were from English speaking countries and 14.8 percent from non-English speaking countries (Australia's increasing ethnic and religious diversity, 2002). It was previously mentioned herein how 15 percent of the population is speaking some language other than English at home (Muslim Australians and local government, 2008) and this number is even higher in Sydney with a total of 27 percent, of which 4.3 percent are Arabic. The Muslim population is very diverse in its origins coming from the Middle East and South East Asian countries such as often mentioned Lebanon, Turkey, Indonesia and Malaysia (Australia's increasing ethnic and religious diversity, 2002).

2.7 Muslims and multiculturalism

One of the biggest strengths of Australia is its cultural diversity with 43 percent born overseas and 200 languages spoken, making it one of the most cosmopolitan countries in the world (Muslim Australians and local government, 2008). The Australian Government is committed to sustain, recognize, accept, respect and to celebrate this multiculturalism so that all Australians have equal rights and maintain their traditions, regardless of their heritage or culture. Still, this policy expects every Australian to be loyal towards Australia and its legal system, such as its constitution, parliamentary democracy, freedom of speech and religion, and the rule of law as well as English as the national language. So multiculturalism is defined as the recognition of the diversity of the Australian population and is meant to support the promotion of tolerance and acceptance of large diverse cultures of Australian people, though it is assumed that all immigrants automatically adapt themselves to the Australian society.

"Integration, in essence then, entailed participation in the key areas of society - namely labor, education, and housing; a pathway to fruitful existence for immigrants. Failure to integrate would result in deprivation. In other words, cut off from the many benefits and privileges available and offered to ordinary citizens." (Muslim Australians and local government, 2008)

The question still arises: Why the Arabic and Muslim cultures are often presented as a threat to Australia? Obviously one major reason is the worldwide impact of the September 11 attacks. Ever since, Australians see themselves directly threatened by terrorism and so innocent Australians with Middle Eastern backgrounds are being wrongly blamed, threatened or isolated. Despite the fact of the praised formulary of multiculturalism, the dominant group expects immigrants to assimilate their traditions and religious believes in a process of secularization. This refers to the beliefs that as society progresses, religion loses its authority in all aspects of social life and governance. In the long run immigrants are supposed to lose their ethnic and religious roots from generation to generation, although joint basic principles of different models of multiculturalism have the assumption that societies cannot be designed as an association of free and equal individuals, who orientate themselves on a culture based on universalistic principles. In fact societies are seen as structures made out of ethnic-cultural arrangements, which do not have an institutional or universal culture, in which minority-and migration cultures shall be included (Scherr 2009, 83). In terms of the "policy of difference", it is in contrast demanded, that an equal amount of respect is brought towards the different cultures as well as to decline the "European or White domination" (Scherr 2009, 84). It is now time for Australia to define a new multiculturalism and address the concerns of all minorities by demonstrating a will to understand the importance of diverse communities. In terms of the Arabic communities, both sides need to work towards appreciation of cultural diversity and establish multiculturalism not as a vision but as the reality.

In doing so the Australian Government has developed a program called The National Action Plan to build on social cohesion, harmony and security in 2005 and 2006. This plan is meant to “reinforce social cohesion, promote harmony and support national security by addressing isolation and marginalization in community, which can make individuals vulnerable to anti-social and destructive ideas” (National Action Plan, 2005). The areas this plan is mainly focusing on are education, employment, integrating communities and enhancing national security. Activities to engage the National Action Plan are leadership and mentoring skills for young Muslims, arts workshops linked to other groups in the community, interaction between young Muslims and non-Muslims in regional areas, cross cultural workshops to change prevailing stereotypes of Islam and women, and publication of a book addressing misinterpretations of Islam and sports programs. This encourages links between young Muslims, indigenous Australians, other minority groups and the wider community. The Human Rights Commission, which is also supporting the Arab Film Festival, runs programs to promote social cohesion and counteract discriminatory views and intolerance towards Muslim Australians. The Department of Immigration and Citizenship manages a nation-wide Harmony Day celebration in March each year, in order to celebrate community participation and promote Australian values, to understand and appreciate the benefits of living in such a diverse and free country. Australia is working with other nations to encourage mutual respect, understanding and cooperation among different religions and cultures (National Action Plan, 2005).

These very positive activities contrast with the impression the Australian Government is giving on integration work and the involvement in the Middle East conflicts, since they don't fit in with the Australian image and are also not the best political discussion point when it comes to election time. “There is a lot of community fear about Islam and when we compare people's attitudes to Muslims, compared to their attitudes, say, to Asian Australians or Indigenous Australians and other so called ‘out groups’ you do find that right now it is Muslims who suffer the highest degrees of intolerance,” says Dr Kevin Dunn, an expert on racism in Australia (Positive Muslim Integration, 2007).

So it appears that when the Australian government is talking about integration, they actually want segregation. Nevertheless Muslims are trying to integrate in Australia but at a slow pace, since the problem clearly is the fear and distrust of mainstream Australia, which prevents a healthy integration process. “It appears Muslims are knocking loudly on the door of mainstream Australia but the problem is many of us are too scared to open it. Because opening the doors would mean having to work next to Muslims, live next to Muslims, or God forbid, even allow our daughters to marry Muslims” (Positive Muslim Integration, 2007). This means a disastrous future if the Muslim acceptance barriers are not addressed. The riots in Muslim ghettos in France have shown what can happen when a large section of a community is disenfranchised. Australia itself does not need to fear such riots, yet many Muslims develop a victim mentality resulting into a negative behavior towards mainstream Australia. This of course then results in further alienation, especially by young Muslims. It takes a political will by the

federal and state government to achieve a positive integration and a more urgent focus on policies addressing economic barriers for Muslim Australians. A significant change in education and employment is needed to not only open up and understand the Muslim culture but also to secure equal chances and opportunities for Muslim Australians to obtain as well as maintain employment.

2.8 The difficult process of integration - The Cronulla riots

The question of Arabic acceptance and integration into the broader society and the social implications of multiculturalism are always accompanied by the security threat posed by homegrown extremists. The acceptance progresses are being complicated by misguided perspectives and have damaged the reputation and also trust between Arabs and non-Arabs. It is the constant debate about how different Arabic and especially Muslim values are compared to Australian and the assumed difficulty Muslims have adapting to them, which is a false statement. Most approaches are equally absurd and have the potential to cause enormous damage. Both sides need to know exactly about the values of the other before approaching either with false background information or even prejudice. Integration policy's primary object is to deal with structural circumstances that lead to disadvantages of the migrants in terms of school and vocational education, working market and the political participation as well as the overcoming of racial prejudice and ideologies that exist in contrast with the acknowledgement of migrants being equally emancipated (Scherr 2009, 83). Several concepts that should acknowledge cultural differences have been created but failed throughout history, as the American idea of the "melting pot", which means that it is expected that the borderline of migrants and minority groups are dissolved with social positioning and indifferences (Scherr 2009, 83). An old Persian proverb says: It takes only one fool to drop something precious into a well, but it takes a hundred wise men to retrieve it. It is time to face reality and understand that there is a decided diversity of Muslim Australians. It is nonsense to judge a whole community by religious devotion, which is surely not the primary characteristic of a Muslim.

Australia is a country of cultural diversity and in fact is based on it, since it has always been a country of immigration and in its young history there isn't really a defined culture. Needless to say the Anglo-Celtic Western culture represents the majority of the country's population and Australia's bond with the British Commonwealth is in full effect. Still it is a country filled with different cultures and people that stake their claims and their position. Generally speaking Australia does not provide a solid foundation for integration, since the actual cultural heritage is the Aborigines and their culture, who have though suffered enormously ever since the first European settlers appeared and

has vanished almost completely. Instead the term of a “parallel society” has become more popular over the years as it is defined as the idea of a voluntarily and aware retreat of migrants into ethnic communities of their own and the denial of integration, which leads to the fear of criminal and obscure actions against the society that endanger the security of state (Worbs 2009, 218). Still, the assumption that Muslim Australians are an unaccepted group of people is only partially true. In fact the social acceptance issue is directly linked to the level of racism and discrimination that still exists in Australia, enflamed by the September 11 attacks, especially in Sydney, where many Lebanese are living. The 2005 Cronulla riots demonstrated these racial trends without a doubt as Australians engaged in a series of riots and mob violence against the Lebanese community in several suburbs across Sydney, starting in Cronulla beach. According to the New South Wales Police Media Report, the incident leading to these riots occurred on December 4 2005, as a group of surf lifeguards were assaulted and attacked by a group of Lebanese on the beach. In fact there had already been a lot of racial tension between the community and Lebanese youths before the event, especially as a lot of women had been harassed and insulted by groups of young Lebanese according to the media. The assault against the lifeguards was reported widely across Sydney and on December 11 2005, approximately 5,000 people gathered around Cronulla Beach to initially peaceful protest against the recent spate of violence against the local community. However, under the influence of alcohol the crowd turned violent against a young Middle Eastern man as they surrounded him and dragged him on the street before the police could intervene and resolve the situation (NSW Police 2005). Things started to heat up even more as several incidents were reported and the crowd repeatedly shouted “No more Lebs!” showing their animosity towards the Lebanese and Arabic community. By the end of the day 26 people were injured, 16 arrested and 42 people were charged with offences including malicious damage, assaulting a police officer, offensive conduct and resisting arrest (NSW Police 2005).

The riots though weren’t over, however, as during the evening a car convoy of 40 cars formed by Middle Eastern men armed with baseball bats, knives and guns gathered in the northwest of Cronulla. Several attacks occurred, including the stabbing of a local Australian man as a group of Australians were approached and attacked by two cars carrying Middle Eastern men. Eventually the police got the situation under control and over the next weeks several people were charged and sentenced by the court (NSW Police 2005). Still today racism is present across the area and it renewed the debate over the appropriate relationship between national identity and multiculturalism.

The New South Wales parliament responded with passing new police laws including the following abilities (Emergency powers to stop riots, 2005):

- ◆ Declare lock-down zones
- ◆ Confiscate vehicles
- ◆ Shut down licensed premises

- ◆ Impose temporarily alcohol-free zones
- ◆ Remove the presumption of bail for the offences of riot and disorder
- ◆ Increase the penalty for riot by five years to 15 years in jail
- ◆ Double the penalty for affray to 10 years in jail

“I won’t allow Sydney’s reputation as a tolerant, vibrant international city to be tarnished by these ratbags and criminals who want to engage in the sort of behavior we’ve seen in the last 48 hours,” former New South Wales Premier Morris Iemma said (Emergency powers to stop riots, 2005). This quiet recent event shows the still existing racial tension between Arab and non-Arab Australians. There is no visible intention from either side towards integration and of course acceptance is far from being reached. Despite the efforts of politicians or social workers, the racial tension is still hard reality, as the Arab Film Festival’s efforts come at the right point in time, in which a huge marginalization of the Arab and in particular Lebanese population is in full effect.

2.9 A challenge to Australian identity - The impact of 9/11

The year 2001 was in general a bad year for Arab Australians, as not only the terrorist attacks on the United States occurred on September 11, but as it was also dominated by constant attempts by the Coalition Government to stop the boats of Muslim asylum seekers. These Muslims searching for asylum in Australia were mainly from Iraq, Palestine, Iran and Afghanistan. The government’s strategy was to stop the boats from coming to Australian shores and attempts at making the stay of those who managed to land as unpleasant as possible.

“The attack on the asylum seekers was similar in function to the ideologies of slavery: when treating someone in ways you know are inhuman it is best to convince yourself that they are inhuman.” (Hage 2002, 241)

In the turn of events and as the story became more popular, the racist associations were attached to all Muslim and Arab Australians in general. Still the Prime Minister John Howard and the Minister for Immigration Philip Ruddock felt offended if someone suggested that their strategy was racist. However, the terror raids of September 11 then clearly added a new dimension to the positioning of Arabs in Australia. The main problem regarding the social acceptance was that the tension was felt even more because of the worldwide migration from the Arabic world, which Arabic terrorism had used and

reached the United States. This resulted into a sense of distrust of many Westerners towards Arabs and Muslims who were living amongst them (Hage 2002, 241).

Dr Nina Madaad of the University of Western Sydney performed a survey among Arabs and Muslims and wrote a paper about how mainstream Anglo-Australian society and the way it responded to the presence of Arabic people in the Australian community, especially after September 11. One point of this paper was clearly the struggle of Australian-born Muslims and their dual identity. With all the negative Arabic stereotypes being projected throughout the world media and the rising prejudice against Muslims, these people are facing a difficult situation. It is more than frustrating for them when they see the way local politicians and opinion-makers use acts of terrorism to construct all Arabs and Muslims in Australia as criminals and a threat to homeland security. These statements put these people in such a desperate situation, since they were born in Australia and also actually feel proud of thinking of themselves as Australians with Arabic background. Now they feel more questioned in their identity than ever before. Every person needs a certain sense of belonging and security but with the latest events and the developing news coverage they find themselves being caught between two cultures. Most of the respondents of the survey revealed that they relate positively to being both Arab and Australian and also see it as a good thing being culturally diverse (Social acceptance as a key to successful integration, 2010). This fact clearly shows how difficult the process of adapting into society is, when even Australian-born Arab Muslims not only question their identity but also are not being fully accepted in society.

The best way to face problems like acceptance, stereotypes and racist barriers towards Arabic people and their culture is education. It explains and clarifies the culture and traditions and makes the host society understand and hopefully interested in more, regardless of their linguistic, cultural or socio-economic background. Even though schools may reproduce social inequalities, including racism and its effects upon minority groups, schools are also in a significant position to challenge social injustice directly. "The respondents maintained that education was important in facilitating the adaptation of the host and immigrant to each other's culture" (Social acceptance as a key to successful integration, 2010). The hope of Arabic language being taught in schools was also emphasized a lot. There definitely is a lack of Arabic culture being taught throughout Australia and especially in Sydney, where Arabs claim a relatively high proportion of the population. The question becomes how integration, acceptance and positive connections can be made with Muslims when so little is being taught. "Cultural knowledge is vital to the process of understanding and appreciating other people and it is the most appropriate way to avoid stereotyping" Dr Nina Madaad says. (Social acceptance as a key to successful integration, 2010)

2.10 Islam and the Western media

One major aspect and aim of the Arab Film Festival is to address the negative stereotypes and misconceptions that are being made throughout the Western media. Despite the fact that Islam is the fastest growing religion in the Western World, many negative reports have been made about the Islam due to prejudice and ignorance. Insulting appellations, such as "extremists", "terrorists" or "fundamentalists" are always popping in people's heads when they think of Islam. That is why to no ones surprise the Islam is disliked and its true teaching is not acknowledged by the majority of the people in the West. The assumption that the Islam promotes any form of terrorist fighting actions inaccurate; it is instead a very peaceful religion (Islam and the Western Media). In today's world the communist "Red Enemy" from the time of the Cold War has been replaced with the Islam and so has been identified as the new enemy of the modern society, especially after America was traumatized by the terrorist attacks on September 11 in 2001. The reputed "menace to the Western society" by the Islam, supports the black and white thinking to divide the world into hostile encampments, such as the Islamic against the Christian world, the Orient against the Occident, theocracy against Western democracy and darkness against elucidation (Massarat 2002, 35). The media promotes the Age of Terror and with "radical Islam as its root of all evil", a common stereotype, which portrays Muslims and Arabs in general as fundamentalists or potential terrorist. The term "fundamentalist" is actually a term that is transfigured and distorted by the media. In fact a fundamentalist only represents a peaceful Muslim, who follows his or her religion. Fundamentalism means an attitude, an effort, or a movement that an ideology, group, or religion tries to promote in its fundamental beliefs. The fundamental beliefs of a Muslim are to believe in only one God and the Prophet Mohammed as his messenger, pray five times a day, fast the month of Ramadan, give alms to the poor and make a pilgrimage to Mecca (Islam and the Western Media). This means every Muslim is a fundamentalist if they believe in their own religion, which is anything but an extremist or terrorist. A chain of misinterpretations leads to the negative stereotype that Muslim fundamentalists are extremists.

Unfortunately this type of media coverage is having a huge impact on Western people's opinion regarding Islam and the Arabic World. The media often misrepresents and inaccurately explains Islam and its manifestations. An example of this is what Saddam Hussein, the former president of Iraq, did in the Gulf War of 1990 and how the media was putting the crisis in context with Islam, giving a one-sided and falsified view. In fact it is concluded that the reasons for such conflicts are primary not between but within the cultures and that the rapid, economic one-dimensional and power-political asymmetric globalization in the last century, has caused social cracks and dangerous cultural breaks. Even militant Islamism is to be understood as a reaction of this asymmetric structured globalization (Massarrat 2002, 206). Nevertheless people believe what they are being told by the newspapers and the TV and there is no reason for them to question the news. Every time there is news from the Middle East, it features a constant association with terrorism. Since the media today is the major source of information and is

shaping public minds like never before, the general public tends to believe the negative image of Islam. Generally speaking Islam has become a negativism in the Western media, which is likely to be sponsored by Western governmental interests. But the concept of the enemy is hard to overcome, since the biggest difficulty is that these concepts fulfill an important role: They generate a climate of fear and to exclude other people emotionally, with the goal to curtail the resistance against our crimes against these people (Piater 2002, 35).

2.11 Misinterpretations and misrepresentation in the Media

Reports by the media concerning events happening in the Arabic world are often misinterpreted and misrepresented. This can develop out of a lack of knowledge, which unintentionally leads to blowing things out of proportion, or it can be due to biased feelings towards Muslims. Thereby many positive events and developments in the Muslim world rarely go noticed or recognized. Many inaccurate representations of Islam such as the Jihad or Muslim women's rights are being made. In the book *Cultural Diversity and the U.S. Media*, writer Bud B. Khleif reflects on his own experience as he criticizes so called American academic experts:

“A prevalent theme seemed to dominate, specially during the question-and-answer part of these public occasions – a theme of negativism often rooted in stereotypes and prejudice against the Middle East, its ethnic groups, customs, languages, and the region’s predominant religion, Islam.” (Khleif 1998, 281)

This view and way of thinking can be traced back to America’s dominance as the only “superpower in the New World” and how it has seized control of the Middle East to secure its natural resources, as the USA depends largely on imported oil from the region according to Khleif. This policy is not only influencing global markets but is also produces a problem of legitimating. In order to solve that problem, agencies such as the schools and mass media are important tools of ideology and “control of consciousness”. Khleif goes even further by saying that, who controls the dominant assumptions of a culture, especially through the mass media and so called experts, controls the hearts and minds of some segments of the population, to condition them to think a certain way about the world we are living in (Khleif 1998, 281). Therefore, concerning the Middle East and the Islam, everything is seen through the haze of “orientalism”. This, according to one of Australia’s most respected journalists Peter Manning, is how the Islamic revolution of the seventh to fifteenth century scared Christian Europe and how Europe has failed to recover from it. Particularly in World War 1, as the British Empire fought against Turkey. There the "orientalism virus" must have been picked up and infected the way of

thinking due to the strong influence of British and American media worldwide. With the September 11 attacks it has gotten even worse and with the lack of knowledge most journalists, editors and producers just went along with creating a new enemy. Through careful and detailed examination of the media, Manning concludes that the representations of the Middle East offer a sustained picture of an unapproachable “Other”, thereby serving the effective role of protecting the political, economic and cultural power of the dominant ethno-cultural and class groups in Australia (Media Representations of Arabs and Muslims in an “Age of Terror”). Fear is being created and almost every terrorist seems to be Arabic or Muslim. Peter Manning quotes a section of his own studies, which underlines the emerging image of Arabs and Muslims, the portrait of sustained fear:

“Arabs, Muslims and Palestinians in particular, are seen as violent to the point of terrorism. Israel, the US and Australia – ‘us’ – are seen under attack from such people and they are seen as both an external and internal threat. ‘Their’ violence is portrayed as without reason, humanity or compassion for its victims. Arab young men, in particular, are seen as especially threatening, wanting ‘our’ Caucasian women and not policed sufficiently by their own communities, who lack either values (respect for women) or interest (accepting responsibility) for these men. The men, women and children seeking to come here ‘illegally’ from the Muslim Middle East are portrayed as tricky, ungrateful, undeserving (possibly well-off), often disgusting and barely human.” Peter Manning (Media Representations of Arabs and Muslims in an “Age of Terror”).

It is safe to say that the media in Australia provides the platform for working through debates of the cultural parameters of society. Since it provides the major pathways for communication in complex societies, the media is the primary machinery in the promotion of both social cohesion and social conflict. So the media has its effect on social cohesion and can in particular rapidly cause damage or identify target groups as it operates. This can be seen more clearly by the four interconnected ways in which the media projects social information and how it communicates with the audiences: marginalization, stereotyping, mobilization and fragmentation (Babacan 2007, 160-161). The following table identifies modes and examples of media in relation to social cohesion. The categories show the focus on different points in the process of revealing specific issues and problems.

Table 6: Modes and examples of media practices

Theory/Process	Marginalization	Stereotyping	Mobilization	Fragmentation
Media as an instrument of control	Sustains dominant ethno-cultural groups; represents dominant worldview	Selectively simplifies and characterizes threats to interests of dominant cultures	Directs society against those seen as threat	Limits participation of marginalized groups; supports fragmentation of minority media
Media as public sphere	Seeks to facilitate expression of diverse worldviews	Acts to undermine stereotypes by portraying contradictory and complex realities	Supports the expression of culture and opinion by multiple publics	Supports participation and group interaction
Media as populist hero	Supports expression of populist “real values” against perceived elites	Operates on crude stereotypes that differentiate “mainstream” from others	Mobilizes masses when perception that threat to core values not acted on by elites	Only allows mainstream views; seek to fragment and exclude “others”

(Babacan 2007, 160-161)

CHAPTER 3

ARAB FILM FESTIVAL

The Arab Film Festival, formally known as Sydney Arab Film Festival, aims to showcase stories from diverse Arabic speaking cultures to all Australian audiences, that reflect the complexity and diversity of Arabic experiences. It takes an active role in featuring international and local films made by Arabic filmmakers, as well as performances, displays and forums. The festival presents diverse identities, experiences and stories of Arabic communities from around the world. It offers a platform for innovative, diverse and socially relevant work that is currently produced, written and directed by Arab Australians. It is about the lives and narratives of the people who comprise a significant proportion of the local population. The festival is screening films, which are not easily accessible in Australia and are of interest to both the Arab and broader Australian community. The films appeal to audiences of all generations, academics and representatives from all levels of government (ICE Archive AFF, 2010).

“It recognizes the power of the screen in being able to do this in a way that many other mediums cannot. It also addresses a continuing and important gap in our creative industries in NSW - recognizing that opportunities are needed to ensure that there are a diversity of stories on screens of all sizes.” (Zaylah, 2010)

The Arab Film Festival is managed by Information and Cultural Exchange (ICE) and driven by an organizing committee that continues to support and build the festival to ensure that it becomes an independent and sustainable creative enterprise. As a community-managed cultural event, the Arab Film Festival supports freedom of thought and resolution of stereotypes, as well as diversity of screen media to enable cultural expressions to flourish. The festival has grown significantly over the past nine years with ongoing support from the New South Wales Government through the Film and Television Office and Arts New South Wales (FTO) as it continues to be a critical force in facilitating dialogue and generating ideas (ICE Archive AFF, 2010). The information throughout this chapter is based on official reports and releases of the ICE archives.

3.1 Aims and objectives

The Arab Film Festival seeks to promote harmony and intercultural exchange in a creative and entertaining environment. It aims to provide opportunities for both Arab and non-Arab communities to access Arabic film culture and a forum for dialogue, particularly among filmmakers and emerging filmmakers to explore these themes. In times of rising intolerance and racism, the festival provides critical spaces and gives exposure to alternative representations of Arabic culture, Arabic commentary and self-representation. By choosing Parramatta as the distinctive location, it intends to develop the filmic and cultural infrastructure of Parramatta and Western Sydney, which is repositioning itself as a cultural city. The festival hopes to inspire and engage the local film production and tries to generate a stronger Arabic screen culture, not only in Parramatta but also across New South Wales. Part of this is enhancing opportunities for Arab Australian communities to see films made by Arab filmmakers and providing these films to the wider community. Since most of the screened films are not easily accessible in Australia, even though of interest to both the Arab and broader Australian community, the festival is enjoying an exclusive position among film festivals in Australia (ICE Archive AFF, 2010).

"The plurality of ideas and cultural expressions is fundamental to the vision of the Arab Film Festival ensuring that the voices of Arabic-speaking people are represented on the big screen. Self-representation and self-definition is key to the Arab Film Festival's brief reflecting its vital connections to community." (Zaylah, 2010)

By presenting high quality and varied film content that entertains but also engages diverse audiences, the festival addresses the negative Arabic stereotypes and misrepresentations, which derive from the current Western view of the Arabic world. Especially through the extensive program, which includes also workshops and forums with open discussions, the festival broadens the understanding of Arabic cultures around the world. It addresses the audience on a personal level by choosing films that appeal to young as well as older generations, film buffs, academics and representatives from all levels of government. In addition it gives non-Arab Australians the opportunity to experience and understand the Arabic culture and situation first hand, which is a very important factor concerning social acceptance. Looking at the cultural information aspect, the festival contributes to inspiration and confidence in contrast to most media coverage throughout Australia and the Western world. It is the ideal platform for Arab Australians and non-Arab Australians to meet and interact as well as learn from each other, as the festival's objectives also serve on an educational level. In recognizing the limited involvement in the local industry, the long-term goals are to generate stronger interest in the possibilities of film, the acknowledgment of the importance of self-representation and a stronger capacity for an involvement in the film industry among Arab Australian communities. It is interesting that the festival does not seek to achieve integration, as it instead works towards acceptance, appreciation and respect of the Arabic culture in Australia's multicultural society (ICE Archive AFF, 2010).

3.2 Target audiences

The festival committee and team have built a brand for the festival and have used a diverse range of strategies to expand on its audiences maximizing publicity opportunities. These are the target audiences for the festival (ICE 2008 Acquittal Report FTO, 2008):

- ◆ First and second-generation migrant Arabs, who lack the opportunity to watch films from their countries of origin or in their first language
- ◆ Arab Australians who lack exposure to films, which reflect their experiences in Australia, and/or their heritage and history of the Arabic world
- ◆ Wider diverse Australians audiences, who can benefit from cross-cultural aesthetic experiences and want to encounter films from the Arabic world and Diaspora
- ◆ Industry professionals and local filmmakers seeking to experience Arabic films and artists making work about their experiences
- ◆ Wider audiences who are interested in developing a better understanding and appreciation of Arabic culture
- ◆ Corporate business communities including: tourism sector, financial businesses, information and technology industry, and community and art professionals

The audiences benefit through the festival by being showcased a wide range of films from Australia and overseas, which reflect the complexity and diversity of Arabic experiences, culture and film. It also provides the opportunity to access and embrace the Arabic film culture for the attending crowd. Most importantly in terms of achieving social acceptance, the audience benefits from the direct dialogue between and amongst Arab and non-Arab communities and particularly amongst filmmakers and emerging filmmakers.

3.3 Why the Arab Film Festival in Parramatta?

The main reason for the festival being in Parramatta is because Arabic-speaking communities are significant there (Table 7: Population Parramatta). It is a heartland of cultural diversity and it is home to some of Sydney's oldest Arabic communities. Also the festival's committee has a strong representation from Parramatta residents (ICE 2008 Acquittal Report FTO, 2008). ICE and the AFF seek to build audiences and encourage participation among local Arabic organizations, schools, religious community and busi-

ness groups, as well as engaging creatively with non-Arabic audiences. The creative programming content will reach out to various audiences, including young people with local and international youth-focused content and performances. In this respect, the AFF is actively connected to the nurturing of local digital/screen-arts content production. Particularly to the development and sustainability of the fledging digital content industries in Parramatta, which are so central to the city's strongly articulated cultural visions (PCC events team proposal, 2006).

"We are keen to implement a media strategy that complements and links closely with Council's plans for situating itself at the cutting edge of arts and cultural development, linked directly into the diverse cultures of the city, and specifically as a place for screen and new media development." (PCC events team proposal, 2006)

The festival reaches out to local businesses through existing sponsorships as well as through opportunities for contribution and participation. It engages communities and brings new audiences to Parramatta. In addition to that, ICE is involving a range of local artists, filmmakers, technical support personnel and performers in a range of activities throughout the festival. This involves a number of events that showcase both local films and local performance artists with cultural and creative linkages to the films being screened. The festival presents a good opportunity for the Parramatta City Council to consolidate and cement its identity as a center for diverse screen culture. ICE intends to give the Arab Film Festival a home, base and identity within Parramatta, linked to its creative vision for the city as a center of creativity and digital innovation, as well as a city of many diverse cultures. The Arab Film Festival represents a chance for the Parramatta City Council to foster a relationship with the festival as an icon for cinema arts development in the city (PCC events team proposal, 2006).

The following tables of the 2006 Census show how diverse and Arabic Parramatta's population is:

Table 7: Population Parramatta

Language spoken at home	Parramatta	% Of total persons in Parramatta
English	5,961	32.3 %
Mandarin	1,991	10.8 %
Cantonese	1,191	6.5 %
Arabic	1,015	5.5 %

Australian Bureau of Statistics

Table 8: Language spoken at Home (Parramatta)

Country of Birth	Paramatta	% Of total persons in Parramatta
Australia	5,990	32.5%
India	2,602	14.1%
China	2,370	12.8%
New Zealand	405	2.2%
Lebanon	402	2.2%

Australian Bureau of Statistics

3.4 Marketing media strategies

A very important key to the festival's success has been its marketing, in order to generate media and public discussion. Having already secured significant respected supporters like the FTO or the Egyptian Consulate, the festival also gives the Parramatta City Council a huge opportunity to promote its host region. Over the years significant publicity and promotion campaigns were undertaken, which included the production and distribution of promotional material, including programs and posters that were distributed in strategic locations across Sydney. Since the Lebanese are not only the major Arabic group in Sydney (Mapping Muslims in Australia, 2006) but also are a major focus of the festival, a number of advertisements have always been strategically placed in the Australian-Lebanese Media. In the year 2005 for example the Festival was promoted in the following print and radio distributors.

3.4.1 Print

Sydney Morning Herald - Metro - 25/11/05 - Mention of free events promoting the event at Riverside Theatres, Parramatta (ICE 2005 Acquittal Report FTO, 2005). The Sydney Morning Herald is the one of the biggest newspapers in Sydney and enjoys a high number of readers. In the year 2007 the paper sold an average of 212,700 copies per weekday and an average 364,000 copies on Saturdays (Circulation of metropolitan and national dailies 2007). There is no better print platform to place advertisements for the festival reaching the majority of the people of Sydney and beyond.

The Daily Telegraph - Sydney live - 25/11/05 - Story by Simon Ferguson and photograph of the festival participants (ICE 2005 Acquittal Report FTO, 2005). The circulation of the newspaper in 2007 between Monday and Friday was 392,000 and on Saturdays 340,000, making it the largest Sydney newspaper (Circulation of metropolitan and national dailies, 2007).

mX Magazine - 24/11/05 - Story on 9 Lives by Vanessa Santer (ICE 2005 Acquittal Report FTO, 2005). The mX magazine is a free newspaper available to commuters in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. Its main channels of distribution are inner-city railway stations, tram and bus stops and major CBD intersections (mx profile, 2010). Since thousands of people use the train in Sydney everyday, a high number of readers are being reached.

3.4.2 Radio

SBS Radio - Arab Program - 25/11/05 - an interview conducted with a member from the festival organizing committee (ICE 2005 Acquittal Report FTO, 2005).

SBS Radio – Worldview: Michael Kenny interviewed Joanne Saad, member of the festival committee (ICE 2005 Acquittal Report FTO, 2005). SBS Radio is a service provided by the Special Broadcasting Service to inform, educate and entertain Australians, especially those of non-English-speaking households. Today the service targets the estimated 2.7 million Australians who speak a language other than English in their home. SBS is broadcasting in 67 languages such as Arabic, Cantonese, Mandarin, Turkish, Albanian, Assyrian, Indonesian and German (SBS, 2010).

Radio National - The Deepened - 30/11/05 - interviewed festival director Fadia Abboud (ICE 2005 Acquittal Report FTO, 2005). Radio National is an Australian-wide non-commercial radio network run by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation ABC (Radio National, 2010).

Triple J - 30/11/05 - Clare Frost interviewed film director Nanzeen Reehman about her documentary (ICE 2005 Acquittal Report FTO, 2005). Triple J is a nationally syndicated Australian radio station intended to appeal to listeners between the ages of 18 and 30. This targets the younger audience, which is very important for the festival (Triple J, 2010).

In addition to this, the festival has been promoted as well through a wide distribution of bookmarks, postcards and posters to locations all across Sydney. Advertisements had been placed in the Parramatta Advertiser, An Nahar, El Telegraph and in online Australian-Lebanese Media Websites. Another key factor for a successful promotion has been the usage of e-marketing campaign, including e-bulletins as well as the festival's own subscriber e-list to provide regular updates and information about sessions and screenings when the festival was underway (ICE 2005 Acquittal Report FTO, 2005).

In the year 2008 World Media International assisted the marketing of the festival significantly with approximately AU\$30,000 worth of advertising sponsorship (ICE 2008 Acquittal Report FTO, 2008). This included 30 commercial slots airing a professionally produced advertisement promoting the AFF in the six weeks leading up to and during the festival. The commercials were aired during prime time weekdays on Lebanese Broadcasting Channel, which is the most popular Arabic language channel in Australia with audiences in the tens of thousands. In addition a professional publicist was engaged to strategically secure placements of promotions in a range of print and other media. As a result of the sophisticated and targeted media campaign, the 2008 Sydney Arab Film Festival generated a massive response from the media. Stories about the festival were featured in many newspapers such as the Sun-Herald, Time Out Magazine, Real Time Magazine, Sydney Morning Herald, Parramatta Sun, Parramatta Advertiser, El Telegraph and An Nahar, SBS radio, ABC Local Radio and Radio National. As a result of this significant marketing campaign the festival won the National Multicultural Marketing Award from the New South Wales Community Relations Commission in 2008 (ICE 2008 Acquittal Report FTO, 2008). Stepan Kerkyasharian, Chair of the Community Relations Commission said:

“This is a true marketing success story which demonstrates that the smart use of every available marketing channel can pay off for a community organization which had only 7,500 dollars to promote their ambitious plan for a language-specific film festival in western Sydney.” (ICE website, 2008)

In the year 2009 once again World Media International assisted significantly with approximately AU\$30,000 worth of advertising sponsorship. A sponsorship by the SBS Foundation was also secured by ICE to support and promote all of its programs including the Arab Film Festival (PCC report, 2009). A 30-second TV commercial was produced, which was then aired on SBS prime time (103 spots) valued at AU\$43,000. The Parramatta City Council event team worked closely with the festival team to maximize local publicity opportunities and also to provide the festival team with direct contact with members of the Jordanian and Lebanese communities. The Parramatta City Council also supported Arabic newspaper advertising and produced street signage and banners, which were displayed in the four weeks leading up to the festival in the main street of Parramatta and outside of the Riverside Theatre. Through the 2009 publicity campaign stories about the festival again were featured in the Daily Telegraph, Sun-Herald, Sydney Morning Herald, Parramatta Sun, Parramatta Advertiser, El Telegraph and An Nahar, SBS radio, ABC Local Radio, Radio National and a range of online articles and listings, such as "What's On Sydney", Timeout Sydney and Sunday Telegraph (PCC report, 2009). Etihad Airways also supported the marketing campaign with a media release about its support of the festival to national media networks. Audience surveys revealed that 46 percent found out about the festival through word of mouth, 27 percent through e-bulletins and online networks, 24 percent received a flier / program, and 14 percent watched the commercial on TV (PCC report, 2009).

3.5 Key strategic partners and alliances

Etihad Airways: Etihad Airways has been a major sponsor of the festival by covering the costs of the airfare of the international guests and filmmakers attending the festival, as well as contributing a total amount of AU\$18,000 (PCC report, 2009). Etihad's support was highlighted to the business sector via a media release distributed by Etihad Airways marketing team. Etihad has verbally committed to support the festival over the next couple of years, gradually increasing their in-kind and cash contributions. For the festival this is a huge step since Etihad Airways is worldwide known for their excellent service and reliability. The International Air Transport Association indicates that Etihad Airways is ranked among the top ten airlines in the world in terms of growth and has taken the top award at this year's World Travel Awards and received Best Airline in the Middle East and Africa by the Irish Travel Trade Awards in 2010 (Etihad Airways Awards, 2010). In Australia Etihad has also become more popular due to its sponsorship to Melbourne's multi-purpose sports and entertainment venue Etihad Stadium and being a major sponsor of the Sport Australian Hall of Fame (Etihad Airways Sponsorships, 2010). This positive image will reflect on the festival in terms of proficiency and efficiency.

World Media International: They specialize in the management and provision of customized high quality Pay TV foreign language channels targeting markets in Australia and the Asia Pacific region. Their partnership and contribution for instance, to the 2009 Arab Film Festival was valued at AU\$33,000 (AU\$30,000 in kind plus AU\$3,000 in cash). Their sponsorship included a direct commercial advertising campaign in the weeks leading up to and during the festival screened on LBC – Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation and ART – Arabic Radio and Television. World Media International is a very important partner since it reaches the Lebanese and Arabic community in general through TV and radio (PCC report, 2009).

Aurora Community Television Channel: With an estimated 1 million viewers across Australia, it supported the festival in airing a 30-second commercial two weeks leading up to the festival and during the national tour. This support is valued over AU\$10,000 (PCC report, 2009).

ArabicNights.com.au: This is a locally owned small business that provided the festival with in kind advertising, including an online Facebook campaign, listing on their website, and regular reminders about the festival to over 10,000 of their subscribers. This sponsorship was valued at AU\$3,000 in kind. Since Facebook has such high membership numbers and is the biggest social networking website in the world, the online campaign is adding enormously to the festival's reputation and awareness among the so important younger generation (PCC report, 2009).

Riverside Theatres: This facility has been a key supporter of ICE and the Arab Film Festival since its inception and has now hosted three festivals in 2007, 2008 and 2009. The professional standard and accessibility of this venue provide the Arab Film Festival with

an opportunity to continue to expand on top of its existing audiences and gain new audiences (PCC report, 2009).

Media Loft and Filmotion Productions: These are small emerging professional screen-based businesses that have contributed in-kind sponsorship to the festival since 2005, including sponsored website design and production services, as well as multimedia documentation support. The value of their support is approximately AU\$10,000. Both businesses have expressed interest in continuing their support for future festivals (PCC report, 2009).

NSW Community Relations Commission: Through a community developments grant they secured AU\$3,000 contribution towards the forums component of the festival. This allowed the festival to invite specialist guest speakers to present topics raised in the films and by audiences (PCC report, 2009).

Egyptian Consulate, Sydney: The Egyptian Consulate has been a supporting sponsor since 2007. In 2009 they assisted in promotions and marketing campaign particularly targeting the Sydney based Egyptian community (PCC report, 2009).

SBS Foundation: The sponsorship was secured by ICE, to support and promote all of its programs, including the Arab Film Festival. The festival team produced a 30 second TV commercial, which was then aired on SBS prime time (103 spots) valued at AU\$43,000 (PCC report, 2009).

3.6 Development of sustainability

The festival has begun to collaborate on targeted Arabic screen culture activities and events that appropriately bear the Arab Film Festival brand. All with a focus of continuing to build audiences for Arabic culture and film in the region and to build partnerships with other organizations and agencies. In 2006 the multimedia event "Siren Call" featured a multimedia presentation and performances of local poets and writers at Riverside Theater, also screening one of the films from the 2005 Festival program "The Siren". This film is an Egyptian documentary exploring the relationship between musicians and the Simsimiyya, an ancient Egyptian stringed instrument. The festival's brand was also represented during the 2006 "Pressure Point" event, where two Lebanese screen artists were featured, based on the program of the Arab Film Festival. ICE saw a strong possibility for occasional selected, targeted screenings at similar events and activities throughout the 2007-09 period. The emphasis was to continue to build the profile and expertise of the Arab Film Festival as an expert and broker for Arabic screen and new media content for film and exhibitions throughout the year. This included preparing and

promoting local Arabic film and new media arts products for international screenings and exhibitions (PCC events team proposal, 2006).

ICE envisages that it will take some years to consolidate and fully incubate Arab Film Festival into its own sustainable entity. The incubation of the festival over this period is part of a broader strategic objective of incubating nascent and emerging arts business entities in the region, particularly those with a possibility of becoming sustainable entities over a period of time. ICE has taken on this role in Parramatta and across the region over a number of years and seeks to have the festival as a model and anchor client. That is why ICE and the festival have been working for years with an emerging group of young Arabic filmmakers from Western Sydney, which has produced two short films. It is the strategic objective that a strong component of the Arab Film Festival eventually is a space for showcasing Arab Australian stories on screen, and providing space for emerging and developing filmmakers to gain skills and experience, screen their work and build audiences (PCC events team proposal, 2006).

3.7 ICE - International Cultural Exchange

Information and Cultural Exchange (ICE) works at the intersection of arts, culture, technology and community. ICE works across Greater Western Sydney, Australia's most culturally various region. The projects creatively engage diverse communities and artists to generate new forms of cultural expression, build community capacity and infrastructures, encourage intercultural dialogue and tell the stories of this extraordinary place. ICE has expertise and success developing digital media, community development and art programs that engage thousands of individuals. It has grown rapidly over the past years, responding to increasing demands of Western Sydney communities for creative opportunities and cultural expressions. Strong relationships with the University of Western Sydney and the FTO have been established, plus it receives core funding from Arts New South Wales and has been an Australia Council key organization for years.

The Arab Film Festival is one of a number of components of ICE's Western Sydney Screen Culture Development Strategy, centered in Parramatta and stretching across the region's rich cultural, creative and artistic interests. The former titled Sydney Arab Film Festival emerged out of a collaborative Western Sydney exhibition in 2001 entitled "East of Somewhere", as ICE managed and supported the inaugural Sydney Arab Film Festival (SAFF) in 2001. The hope and intention was to establish an independent, functional and sustainable local infrastructure and an annual event in the Parramatta.

Subsequent SAFF events have been managed by ICE, including the highly successful "Big Night of Arab Shorts" in 2004 and the second Sydney Arab Film Festival in 2005, which

was staged in Parramatta, Bankstown and Campbelltown. These are areas where significant numbers of Arab Australians are living (Table 2). An evaluation of this festival identified the need for a "home" for SAFF and a coherent vision and presentation of the festival, which also requires the support of a single local government partner. For many reasons, including the recognition that the most successful and well-attended SAFF events have been staged in Parramatta, ICE and the festival committee have identified Parramatta as the priority area. ICE continues to support and build the festival to ensure that it becomes an independent and sustainable creative enterprise (PCC events team proposal, 2006).

3.8 Projection in the media

3.8.1 Sydney Morning Herald

On 23 March 2008 the newspaper Sydney Morning Herald published an article by Adam Fulton about the 2008 SAFF. In this article he quotes both directors about the excitement of the festival and the premiere of the film "Caramel", which was screened on opening night several months before its official release in Australia. In general, festival directors Mouna Zaylah and Fadia Abboud fill most part of the article with quotes and statements (SMH 2008 AFF, 2008).

In the Sunday edition called the Sun-Herald, the article "Middle Eastern promise" by Elissa Blake was published on June 28 in 2009. The picture shows both festival co-directors Mouna Zaylah and Fadia Abboud with the subtitle "Something for everybody". The article starts about how under-represented the Arabic speaking countries are on the big screen in a city of film festivals. It then quotes festival co-director Mouna Zaylah with a very meaningful statement - "You turn on the news every night and there is a story involving someone from an Arabic-speaking country background that is gang related or drug related - nothing but ugly stories. We want to put diverse stories out there so the broader Australian community can understand that not all Arabs are fundamentalists, or even Muslim (Sun-Herald article, 2009)." In fact the line "You turn on the news every night and...nothing but ugly stories" is highlighted bigger and in the color red in the middle of the article, underlining the issue and pressure points of the festival and the ongoing misconceptions about the Arabic culture. It is a quote that speaks for the festival's message and aims in terms of understanding and acceptance. The article continues with quotes of Fadia Abboud about the major films that are being screened throughout the festival. Elissa Blake then indicates the urge for such a festival by writing "Many of the screenings in last year's Arab Film Festival were sell-outs, an indication of the hunger among the Arab Australian community to see themselves represented on the screen

(Sun-Herald article, 2009)." All in all this entire article is definitely speaking very positively about the festival's diversity and the meaning it has for the Arab Australian community as well as how interesting it is for non-Arab Australians.

3.8.2 The Daily Telegraph

Evelyn Yamine wrote an article about the 2009 festival animation film "Hurriya and her Sisters" by artist and Bankstown local Layal Naji. With the headline "Arab women's cinema caravan" and the theme of the animation film being about breaking down stereotypes about the Arabic culture, as it shows the focus about Arabic women in this article. It also talks about other films being screened and quotes festival co-director Mouna Zaylah. "It is not just for the Arabic community in Australia. The stories are coming from all over the world and show the diversity of the Arabic community (Arab women's cinema caravan, 2009)". The article gives a good impression about the festival and makes people interested in more.

3.8.3 Parramatta Advertiser

A rather short article was to be found in the Parramatta Advertiser in 2009. With the headline "Jordanian film to star in Arab fest" it talks about the first Jordanian film to be screened in Australia. It is the film Captain "Abud Raed", which entered the 2009 Academy Awards for best foreign language film and won the Audience Award at the 2008 Sundance Film Festival. The article is rather neutral but still positive, as it talks about the film and quotes festival co-director Mouna Zaylah about the festival. "This unique festival will screen a collection of the latest features, short films and documentaries that sparkle with the rich and beautiful complexity of Arabic cultural, social and political life (Jordanian film to star in Arab fest, 2009)."

3.8.4 Community Relations Commission

On 25 November 2008 another article was published, this time about winning the National Multicultural Marketing Award. With the title "Arabic film festival breaks language and cultural barriers to win important award" (CRC award article, 2008), the article positively talks about this ceremony. "The group cleverly exploited the perception that people from one of the world's most troubled regions would be hungry for stories and representations of their culture that are not limited to themes of conflict and war. They were right but they also discovered that the non-Arabic speaking movie fans also wanted to see stories of day to day life in the Middle East (CRC award article, 2008)." The article continues with the statement that it wasn't for the quality of the films, which is not speaking in favor for the festival's quality and can be seen as direct criticism.

"However, it wasn't necessarily the quality of the films that brought so many people to the venue. It was more likely the creative marketing campaign that not only won over Arabic language newspapers, television and radio but also spread the message through community internet sites including Australian Lebanese media websites, e-bulletins and social network sites including Facebook, as well as meeting places and cafes (CRC award article, 2008)." It then talks about how and where the posters, fliers and postcards were distributed as well as the effective innovation of producing a television commercial and how successful the marketing was initialized. The article finishes with a very positive and impressive statement for the festival, as Stepan Kerkyasharian, chair of the community Relations Commission is quoted. "I am sure there are many lessons in this campaign for commercial marketers, big and small and for marketing managers at all tiers of government (CRC award article, 2008)."

3.9 Government funding

3.9.1 Film and Television Office and Arts New South Wales (FTO)

The FTO is a statutory authority of the NSW Government, whose main function is to be a key partner in the creative and economic development of the state, as it provides financial and other assistance to the film industry for the activities, persons and project developments. The office's official vision is to "stimulate creative and business opportunities in the screen industry and promote innovation in screen content and technology, and champion the contribution the NSW screen industry makes to our culture, economy and society (FTO, 2010)." The FTO invests time, energy and resources to build a solid foundation for the film and screen culture across New South Wales. Over the last years Information Cultural Exchange has developed a strong relationship with the FTO and receives funding for their activities such as Africa on Screen, Digital Storytelling, Switch Academy and of course the Arab Film Festival. In fact because of the Arab Film Festival, ICE received a lifting of the amount of funding, as the FTO recognizes the importance of this event. The relationship is mainly focused on the development of a coherent and strategic Western Sydney Screen Culture program, which is centered in Parramatta but with a regional focus. Part of this is in the development and production of the new media formats that engage cultures and contributions of the region's diverse artists and communities. The FTO remains a key investor for this Arab Film Festival, supporting it since its inception and for example contributed a grant amount AU\$10,000 in 2009 and 2010 (PCC report, 2009).

3.9.2 Parramatta City Council (PCC)

“We are proud to be a key sponsor of the Sydney Arab Film Festival. This festival not only celebrates the world of Arabic culture but also invites the entire community to share the diverse and touching stories of the largest single ethnic group in Parramatta (PCC report, 2009).” This statement made by Paul Barber, Lord Mayor of Parramatta, as he welcomed the opening night audience for the screening of the film “Caramel” in 2008. The PCC is the principle sponsor of the Arab Film Festival and says it is “proud to host a festival that celebrates the rich and complex stories of the Arabic culture from around the world (PCC report, 2009).” The sponsorship towards the festival has been crucial as part of a 3-year strategy from 2007 till 2009, and partnership between Information and Culture Exchange and PCC. The commitment and support included a contribution of AU\$12,000 per year, plus assistance and support with promotions, marketing and relationship development. Particularly with the focus on local businesses and sponsorships opportunities with an in-kind value of AU\$8000, as well as the assistance with developing strong and long-term partnership with Riverside Theaters (PCC report, 2009).

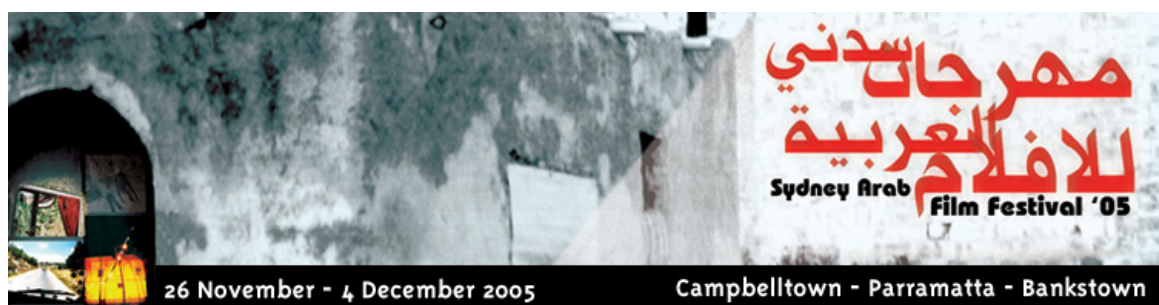
3.9.3 Australian Human Rights Commission

The Australian Human Rights Commission’s mission is leading the promotion and protection of humans rights in Australia by empowering people to understand and exercise their human rights through working with individuals, communities, businesses and government to inspire action (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2010). That’s why it is has been supporting the Arab Film Festival as for example in 2009, enabling it to become a national event, touring a selection of the films to a number of states across Australia. This has provided an agreement in place that secures the festival’s national tour until 2011 (PCC report, 2009).

3.10 History and Statistics of Specific Events

To get an idea of the impact the festival was having over the last couple of years and to examine developments in terms of activities and targeted audiences, it is now to look at the program and the statistical reports of the following editions. The festival has been growing in terms of audiences and program diversity and is reaching more and more people nation-wide.

3.11 Sydney Arab Film Festival 2005



3.11.1 Program and Activities

A key objective of the 2005 festival was to develop the filmic and cultural infrastructure of Western Sydney with a festival for a community with high representation in the vibrant cultural life of the region. This included supporting and nurturing the working group of the Sydney Arab Film Festival so, as to provide an ongoing annual festival of this kind. Another aim was to generate a stronger Arabic screen culture in New South Wales. Part of this was enhancing opportunities for Arab Australian communities to see films made by Arabic filmmakers and providing these films to the wider community. The second Sydney Arab Film Festival (SAFF) opened at a function hosted by Campbelltown Arts Centre on Thursday 24 November 2005. The program rolled out over five days – inclusive of two consecutive weekends. SAFF 2005 was opened by the Campbelltown Mayor Clr Russell Matheson and addressed by guest speaker Ghassan Hage, the noted anthropologist, commentator and author of "White Nation" and other critical works on Australian identity, culture and nationalism (ICE 2005 Acquittal Report FTO, 2005).

In accordance with the application submitted to the FTO, the program featured international and local films made by Arabic speaking filmmakers from the diverse range of experiences, stories and identities arising from the varying Arabic communities around the world and locally. The international feature film program incorporated a range of films from across the Middle East, as well as international co-productions and films of the Arabic Diaspora. As identified in the application, there was an international callout for films via the Internet, but much of the sourcing for the program was done by ICE and through the organizing committee. Primarily this was reached through research and

direct contact with other film festivals and distributors. In a self-funded trip to the Middle East in 2005, festival co-director Fadia Abboud met with a range of distributors and identified quality productions. She also established important ongoing international contacts on behalf of ICE and the festival organizing committee (ICE 2005 Acquittal Report FTO, 2005). The program included a strong emphasis on Palestinian themes – including the epic feature "The Door to the Sun", a locally-produced documentary "I Remember 1948", the hour-long documentary exploring Palestinian identity through family and Arab classical music "Improvisation" and "The Children of Ibdaa". The program also incorporated a component of classic Arabic films from Egypt to encourage an older audience to participate in the festival. These films are rarely seen on the big screen and some had never been screened in Australia before. This component attracted strong representation from Arabic speaking seniors returning to the films after many years. The Egyptian classics session included "Afrita Hanem" and "Fatma". The festival also had a strong focus on local films, with the majority of entries to the festival being selected for screening (ICE 2005 Acquittal Report FTO, 2005).

3.11.2 Statistical Report

Table 9: Benefit Regions of 2005

Benefit Regions	Estimated percentages of the FTO funding that benefited
Metropolitan Sydney	10%
Western Sydney	85%
Regional Sydney	5%

ICE 2005 Acquittal Report FTO, 2005

The strong and intended focus on Western Sydney is clearly stated in this chart. Back in 2005 it was to establish an annual event and to gain recognition as well as reputation in the community.

Table 10: Audience Demographics 2005

Youth	35%
Seniors	20%
Women	50%
Indigenous	2%
Multicultural	90%
Gay / Lesbian	8%

ICE 2005 Acquittal Report FTO, 2005

Table 11: List of Screenings 2005

Number of Australian features	1
Number of Australian documentaries	4
Number of Australian short films	5
Number of international features	13
Number of international documentaries	8
Number of international short films	19

ICE 2005 Acquittal Report FTO, 2005

This table clearly states the high numbers of international films that entered the festival's program and at the same time highlights the lack of Australian productions. To support Australian films was and still is one of the main aims of the festival.

3.12 Sydney Arab Film Festival 2008



3.12.1 Program and Activities

The 2008 Sydney Arab Film Festival was held from 10 to 13 April 2008 at Riverside Theatres Parramatta. The festival engaged with genuine, diverse stories and narratives about Arabic culture. It featured international and Australian films made by Arabic-speaking filmmakers, selected from and representing a diversity of experiences, stories and identities. Audiences met and mingled with local and international filmmakers, as well as guest speakers presenting at the film screenings. The 2008 program presented a collection of the latest features, short films and documentaries that sparkle with the rich complexity of Arabic cultural and political life. The festival program opened with the Australian premier in 35mm of a beautiful award-winning feature from Lebanon called "Caramel - Between haircuts and sugar waxing with caramel, five women in a Beirut beauty salon, share their intimate and liberated experiences that revolve around men, sex and motherhood (ICE 2008 Acquittal Report FTO, 2008)." Both local and internationally produced documentaries included thought-provoking perspectives from Lebanon and Palestine, as well as the first uncensored feature film in over a decade to come out of Iraq titled "Underexposure". Both the Lebanese and Palestinian sessions were presented as forums, where filmmakers, guest speakers and the audience discussed topics and issues raised in the films. In celebrating 80 years of Egyptian cinema, Egyptian filmmaker Saad Hendawy and his latest feature film "Seventh Heaven" was hosted. In addition two locally made documentaries that investigated the 2006 Israel war on Lebanon were screened, followed by a discussion with the filmmakers. These included the feature documentary "Lebanon Burning". To mark the 60th anniversary of "al Nakba", the catastrophe that commenced in 1948, where 750,000 Palestine Arabs became refugees by the end of the first Arab-Israeli war, Palestinian-made films were screened, followed by a forum with guest speakers (ICE 2008 Acquittal Report FTO, 2008).

3.12.2 Statistical Report

Table 12: Benefit Regions 2008

Benefit Regions	Estimated percentages of the FTO funding that benefited
Metropolitan Sydney	30%
Western Sydney	70%
Regional Sydney	0%

ICE 2008 Acquittal Report FTO, 2008

In 2008 still the major proportion of the audience came from Western Sydney, which can be interpreted by the aspect that in this region most Lebanese are living and the Lebanon/Palestine Forum was of high interest.

Table 13: Audience Demographics 2008

Youth	35%
Seniors	10%
Women	65%
Indigenous	0%
Multicultural	75%
Gay / Lesbian	5%

ICE 2008 Acquittal Report FTO, 2008

Table 14: List of Screenings 2008

Number of Australian features	0
Number of Australian documentaries	1
Number of Australian short films	6
Number of international features	7
Number of international short films	3

ICE 2008 Acquittal Report FTO, 2008

3.13 Arab Film Festival 2009



3.13.1 Program and Activities

With the launch of the national tour and a change of name the 2009 Arab Film Festival was held over four days from the July 2 to July 5 at Riverside Theatres Parramatta. It presented an exciting program, which showcased stories offering audiences a remarkable contrast of perspectives. The festival team worked closely with the event team at PCC, building a great working relationship that has enabled the festival to continue to grow audiences and draw local business support and interest. Since 2007 the festival's audience had increased by 85 percent, entertaining over 5,500 people, many of whom have not previously attended events at Riverside Theatres (PCC report, 2009). The festival committee and team had successfully built a brand for the festival and have used a diverse range of marketing strategies to expand on its audiences, maximizing publicity opportunities. The films secured and forums developed have also played a key role in profiling the AFF. As in 2008, also this time audiences met and mingled with local and international filmmakers, as well as guest speakers presenting at the film screenings, and forums to enable discussion about the issues and questions raised in the films. Opening night successfully screened "Captain Abu Raed", an Australian premiere – an award-winning feature from Jordan and the first Jordanian feature film to be screened in Australia. Winner of the Audience Award at the 2008 Sundance Film Festival, this crowd-pleasing film is a gentle yet hard-hitting drama set in Amman, Jordan (PCC report, 2009).

The Friday night session screened "Beirut Open City", and hosted the filmmaker Samir Habchi, a well-known director across the Arabic world, who makes drama for television, as reactions were intense and discussions heated amongst the audiences. The filmmaker Habchi was pleased with the huge turnout from the Arabic community, predominantly Lebanese and Syrian, who had traveled from all over Sydney to see the Australian premier of this film (PCC report, 2009), an indicator of the success and popularity of this forum.

Saturday's first session was "Makhlouta" (meaning mix in Arabic), which featured a selection of local and internationally produced short films with music clips, animations, documentaries and drama. This collection kept the audiences entertained, taking them

across the Arabic world with stories from Palestine, Lebanon, Kuwait, Iraq, Morocco, Egypt, Tunisia, Jordan, and also featured a short film made by a young woman named Nadine Chamas from Melbourne. This was followed by the “Iraq, Past, Present and Future” session featuring Australian premiere “Life After the Fall”, a story about the director’s family living in Baghdad struggling to accommodate the massive changes in their lives since the fall of the regime in 2003 to present times. Over three hundred people attended this session, most of them with an Iraqi background – many of them too familiar with the situations depicted in this film. A very emotional audience responded with applause at the conclusion of the film. The Saturday session closed with a feature Algerian comedy “Paloma Delight,” also an Australian Premiere. This film attracted the Algerian community from across Sydney, as well as the French speaking community as this film was in French (PCC report, 2009).

The Sunday session hosted the world premiere of “Huriyya and Her Sisters”, the first Arab Australian animation produced by young and local Muslim Australian women. This short film explored the young women’s experiences of the world. The film was made in workshops held over 18 months in a community cultural development project where over thirty participants learnt how to create sound, visuals and storylines. “Huriyya and Her Sisters” was launched by acclaimed author and Australian-Palestinian Randa Abdel-Fattah and presented as part of a forum “Dreaming of 1001 Rights”. The forum also hosted a number of filmmakers, local and international including Nawal Abdi from Australia, indigenous Australian Romaine Moreton, and Nicholas Rowe from New Zealand (PCC report, 2009).

Egyptian cinema is always featured in the festival and that year it honored the late Youssef Chahine with his 1958 classic film titled “Bab al Hadid”. This film is considered to be Chahine’s masterpiece, a gritty neo-realist drama, which provides powerful social commentary on sexuality, repression and violence in the margins of Cairo. The closing film was a modern tale from Egypt called “Eye of the Sun” directed by Ibrahim El Batout, which was the first independent feature film to be distributed in Egyptian cinemas. The director’s journalist background is evident in this film, as he explores class structures, poverty and the environment and how the lives of people, young and old interact with everyday challenges (PCC report, 2009). This program underlines the diversity of the Arab Film Festival program drawing many different cultures together in a cinematic experience.

3.13.2 Statistical Report

Table 15: Audience Demographics 2009

Youth	32%
Seniors	9%
Women	56%
Multicultural	84%
Gay / Lesbian	7%
Metropolitan Sydney	45%
Western Sydney	52%
Interstate	2%
International	2%

ICE Archives – Audience survey 2009

In 2009 the most significant number are the 45 percent from Metropolitan Sydney. The event has definitely gained a reputation and the marketing has successfully reached the wider region of Sydney. This will be even clearer in the upcoming survey results.

Audience Feedback - Survey Results

An overwhelming number of 85.2 percent of audiences were not from the Parramatta area, indicating how the festival's audience is growing massively in both numbers as well as drawing in people from outside of the region. Sixty-three percent of audience members identified as Arab Australians and included people from Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Sudan, Jordan, Palestine, Iraq and Egypt. Forty-six percent of attendees were aged between 21 and 40, and overall 75 percent stated that they very much enjoyed attending the festival. Also, 84 percent of them stated that they would definitely come again (PCC report, 2009).

Table 16: List of Age Classes 2009

Age under 20	15
Age 21-30	38
Age 31-40	37
Age 41-50	35
Age 51-60	22
Age 60+	13

ICE Archives – Audience survey 2009

Table 17: Cultural Backgrounds 2009 (Abridgment)

Australian	25
Arabic	6
Egyptian	12
Iraqi	7
Lebanese	61
Palestinian	6
Somalia	3
Sri Lanka	4

ICE Archives – Audience survey 2009

High numbers of Lebanese guests reflect the focus of this year's festival on Lebanese films and culture.

Table 18: How did you find out about the festival? 2009 (Abridgment)

Word of Mouth	75
Email	27
Newspaper	12
Website	17
Radio	14
Flyer/Poster	24
TV	23
Facebook	3

ICE Archives – Audience survey 2009

A rather unexpectedly low number found out via Facebook, which is surprising due to its high profile. On the other hand it shows how successful print advertising still is in times of multimedia marketing. The audiences included a cross-section of Arabic and non-Arabic communities in Sydney. All sessions were well attended with opening night sold out. The forum “Dreaming of 1001 Rights”, which featured the world premiere of Arab Australian made animation “Huriyya and Her Sisters” was very popular with 321 people attending that session engaging with the young filmmakers and participating in the discussion (PCC report, 2009). The Friday night session was the most popular, after opening night, with 447 people attending to watch the “Beirut Open City”, and meet the guest filmmaker Samir Habchi. Discussions were intense and entertaining. One of the major achievements of that year’s edition of the festival was the larger audience for almost all sessions. Opening night was a sell-out with over 750 people attending as the festival’s location in Parramatta has continued to draw in new audiences, diverse in age and backgrounds (PCC report, 2009). The festival generated significant media attention from mainstream press to critical arts publications to online and broadcast publicity, including ABC News, SBS Radio and feature articles in The Australian.

3.13.3 National Tour 2009

In order to respond to this growing national profile, the festival selected key films as part of the inaugural national tour of the Arab Film Festival. Sydney audiences voted these films as favorites (ICE Archives voting results, 2009):

Beirut Open City	64 votes
Paloma Delight	56 votes
Huriyya and her Sisters	50 votes
Makhlouta	32 votes
Iraq	23 votes
Cairo Station	23 votes
Eye of the Sun	22 votes

Strategic partnerships were developed with key venues across Australia to host and screen the festival to national audiences, accompanied by discussions and forums. During November 2009 the national tour commenced at the Dendy Opera House in Sydney, then traveled interstate to the Australian Centre for the Moving Image in Melbourne, Mercury Cinema in Adelaide, Dendy Portside in Brisbane. These states were selected based on research, which indicated that they were home to generations of Arab Australians, and are not often exposed to events that profile and showcase Arabic stories on screen. In doing so the festival developed interstate relationships to ensure that local audiences, arts and screen-based organizations and venue partners are actively involved and support this venture. These venues also showed a high interest to continue to work closely with the festival and to help build audiences in the future, which is a major achievement to secure that national impact on the Arabic communities. The festival committee connected and developed partnerships with Arabic based organizations, institutions and government bodies that have a focus on Arabic communities in all target locations, which will assist to maximize marketing opportunities for national screenings (ICE Archive AFF, 2010).

CHAPTER 4

Conclusion

The question is posted: Does the Arab Film Festival in Sydney really does support the social acceptance of the Arabic culture in Australia? Nine years after the first and originally called Sydney Arab Film Festival and the recently started national tour, this cultural event has had a huge impact on understanding and interaction between the Arabic and non-Arabic communities without a doubt. Yet the festival does not seek to support integration but instead it wants to provide critical space and work against the negative representations of Arabs around the world, especially in Australia.

Needless to say, the festival is an event for the Arabic communities across Australia and wants to give them an opportunity to experience the filmic culture and grant access to films that are not being screened in Australia. Though it aims to raise awareness of the struggles within the Arabic World, it also focuses on Arab Australians and their fight, as they are being caught between two cultures. It was previously mentioned that many Arab Australians who have been born and lived all their lives in Australia now face the challenge of not being socially accepted due to the distrust and prejudice towards the Arabic communities across the country and Western world in general (Social acceptance as a key to successful integration, 2010). For them this is a desperate situation, as they now are being questioned in their identity, since they feel like Australians but with a bit more cultural status and background. In some way this is ironic, since Australia is based on immigration and people with different cultural backgrounds. But as the Arabs and Muslims have now been targeted as the new enemy of homeland security and the ongoing associations with terrorism that are proclaimed by the Western media, their cultural heritage has become their curse.

As mentioned in the second Chapter Australia's cultural and ethnic diversity and the fact that 15 percent of the population does not speak English at home (Australia's increasing ethnic and religious diversity, 2002), indicates Arab-Australian's the commitment to their culture. Especially the Asian section of the population is growing significantly as is the Arabic population. That is why the festival does not intend to support the integration but is instead an event for the Arabic community that addresses the false statements, bad representations and negative stereotypes that have been promoted in the so called "Age of Terror". Integration may not be possible in Australia, as it has happened in many other countries around the world, since in its young history it has become such a multicultural place. Australia is a country that is so diverse in terms of cultures and religions that the question would have to be raised, in what culture exactly the Arabic communities are supposed to integrate in? Instead, all cultures seek to live amongst the others in a mutual relationship of harmony, trust, understanding and appreciation for the others, but with the intention to practice their traditions and beliefs, while adapting and adjusting to the Australian way of life. Whether it is the Chinese, the Greek, the Italians, the Indians or the Germans, Arabic people are not different as they contribute as

much as the other cultures to Australia's diversity, which actually makes it such a unique place in the world. That is why the festival is addressing these issues such as the often-mentioned negative stereotypes, misconceptions and misrepresentations to work towards social acceptance.

While this festival started as a rather small event in 2001, it has been growing significantly from year to year. It grew not only in terms of numbers and films but also in its diversity of program. In 2005 the Festival started to become more sophisticated and established a deeper reputation in Sydney and across New South Wales. According to the FTO Acquittal Report in 2005 by ICE, significant and diverse audiences attended the second edition of the festival with a strong representation of the senior members of the Arabic communities. Also a very positive response was received by the younger audiences to the locally produced-films, which reflect on the lives of the audiences (ICE 2005 Acquittal Report FTO, 2005). Films about racism and prejudice as well as the long struggle of adjustment for immigrants coming to Australia, were showcased and enjoyed high interest. It is very important to attract young audiences, since they build the foundation of a successful future but also have recently become more opposing towards the Australian way of media coverage and government. But this comes as no surprise as a lot of Muslims have developed a negative behavior towards mainstream Australia, which has resulted into further alienation because of the prejudice and distrust throughout Australia towards Arabs and Muslims. It was also a big success in terms of establishment, especially through the self-funded trip of festival co-director Fadia Abboud to the Middle East and her strong commitment and ambition sourcing out quality productions and contacting distributors. The festival engendered much higher awareness and reputation. Such compassion and determination is rewarded with the success of the festival and the high positive feedback that it received.

The program became more diverse and was addressing different generations and communities. Especially through the Egyptian classic films from the late 1940's "Afrit Hanem" and "Fatma" even the older generations returned to the theater and got involved in the event. Maybe integration is not possible but perhaps understanding and clarification are also achieved through exchange of experiences and opinions, especially between young and old generations. Sharing their stories and opinions throughout such an event is worth gold regarding social acceptance and a better understanding of a misrepresented culture. Another important factor was the emphasis on local films and filmmakers, which not only gave them the chance to present their work but also integrated and supported this emerging film community in Australia. Part of this was also successfully developing a filmic and cultural infrastructure of Western Sydney, a chance for local filmmakers to present their work and talent (ICE 2005 Acquittal Report FTO, 2005). It is very important for the festival to provide a platform for these emerging filmmakers and serve as a springboard, since it is very difficult for them to present their work elsewhere.

In 2008 the focus was on the ongoing war between Israel and Palestine and Lebanon, screening locally produced documentaries followed by discussions with the filmmakers. These so-called Palestine and Lebanon forums enjoyed a high number of attendants and enthusiasm (ICE 2008 Acquittal Report FTO, 2008). As previously mentioned herein the Lebanese community in Sydney is huge (Convy/ Monsour, 2008) and such a forum is the perfect entrée for interaction between filmmakers and the audience as well as Arab Australians and non-Arab Australians. Since the media coverage has not projected a positive image of the Arabic world or given a real insight of the situation of the people in Lebanon and the Lebanese coming to Australia, this forum was unique. Bringing together all these people from different backgrounds in one forum to discuss the film and the situation in Palestine and Lebanon with the filmmakers is the best way to interact, learn and engage in terms of understanding and acceptance in Australia's society. The direct dialogue and exchange among different cultures from Australia and abroad serves on an educational and political level.

"We host filmmakers from overseas and create spaces for local filmmakers and audiences to meet and get to know them, discuss their interests, themes they explore in their work and similarities and / or differences between Arabic communities living in Australia, in the Diaspora and within Arabic countries around the world." (Zaylah, 2010)

The lack of education about Arabic culture throughout the school system and the Australian society itself is being counteracted in the Arab Film Festival. Some of the films that were screened throughout these forums were quite touching since they show the hard and brutal reality that people have to face each day in these war-shattered areas. Australia needs to understand and wake up to realize the difficult situation of Arab Australians and also how important they are in society. Another key aspect, which speaks for the efficiency of this event, in reaching political awareness and the interest of many people across Sydney and beyond, is the achievement of winning the National Multicultural Marketing Award in recognition for their excellent marketing work for the 2008 edition of the festival (ICE 2008 Acquittal Report FTO, 2008).

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the 2009 Arab Film Festival attracted an overwhelming number of 85.2 percent attendants of the audiences, who were not from the Parramatta area (PCC report, 2009). This clearly indicates the improving reputation and high profile the festival has achieved. The forums, especially around the Animation film "Hurriya and her Sisters" had a big impact as well. They provided an opportunity for people from diverse backgrounds to engage in public discussion around the social, political and cultural issues explored in the films and more broadly, in popular culture. The festival was able to host a critical space and encouraged dialogue around the issues affecting Arab Australians communities in ways that do not further marginalize and silence. Young Arab Australians were especially encouraged to be part of the dialogue via the "Huriyya and Her Sister" project, which was supported by the Australia Council and Australian Human Rights Commission (PCC report, 2009). The project participants received the opportunity to present themselves at this forum, hosting the event, participating in dis-

cussions and engaging with audiences, in response to the stories reflected in the film/animation they produced and the experience they have as Arab Australians.

With the rebranding process in the same year of naming this event simply the Arab Film Festival, the intention of growing bigger and reaching out to more people is obvious. It has developed from a local to a nation-wide event reaching out to all Arab Australians and non-Arab Australians throughout the country and beyond. It now takes on the social acceptance process in every state indicating the importance and influence of the Arabic communities in Australia.

Still the Arabic communities in Sydney and whole Australia are facing desperate times and the Cronulla riots and the ongoing negative stereotypes in the media reveal the racial trends towards the Arabic and Muslim Australians (NSW Police Report, 2005). The problem too is that some Australians accept Muslims in their neighborhood, while others simply see Muslims as a threat to homeland security. So for them further immigration is basically seen as a threat. But the Arab Film Festival is doing such great work to make wide Australian audiences not only understand but also interested in more about the culture, religion and traditions of the Arabic World. Australia also needs to realize that their foreign policy in the Arabic world is reflecting on the Arabic communities in Australia. Most Arab Australians react very upset and disappointed in how the Australian government is or actually is not taking action in the events in the Middle East, even though the numbers and the resulting importance of the Arabic community is constantly on the rise. Australia must appreciate the fact that most Arab Australians see themselves as Australians (Muslim Australians and local government, 2008), which is an absolute advantage in terms of establishing a state of different cultures and influences, as it is clearly the opposite in a lot of European countries. Looking at Germany or France for example, a high number of Arabs do not identify themselves with the country they are living in. In fact only 32 percent of the Turks in Germany have got the German Citizenship and also 30 percent do not have a school-leaving certificate (Welt Online, 2009). So the real struggle for Arab Australians is if they should question their identity in times where their culture and heritage are being proclaimed as the root of terrorism and violence. The work towards social acceptance in any kind of form is desperately needed in Australia, since it seems to frivolously play with the so far loyalty and identification of Arab Australians towards Australia itself.

The Arab Film Festival does its part in gaining political awareness and importance. Since it has become a nation-wide event and is reaching out to not only all Arab Australians but also everybody else across the country and thereby growing rapidly, the impact on addressing the negative and wrong stereotypes in the future will be vast. It has established its position nation-wide starting as a local event in 2001, which indicates the demand and need for such an event and platform of exchange for the Arabic community. According to the annual growth and addition of alliances, partnerships and sponsors, the economic and political involvement is of high interest as well. The festival though also takes a very defined political direction and position. In doing so, no films or fea-

tures from Israel are being showcased, emphasizing their support and concentration towards Palestine and Lebanon. The author himself experienced, as he was part of the festival staff, that films from Israel were not even considered during the process of selection. So the Arab Film Festival is definitely holding a political view, which eventually is also affecting the audience as well as the partners. But these partners are clearly huge and also stand with their name and brand for the festival and its political and ethical views. With a key partnership with Ethihad Airways for example, it speaks for the quality and seriousness of the Arab Film Festival.

To sum up, the Arab Film Festival provides a huge impact on social acceptance through a media event. Psychologically it gives the people who attend it a feeling of belonging, opens up chances to interact and communicates social values, as it also fights the negative stereotypes of Arabic people. It demonstrates that the Australian society has a variety of groups and individuals, views and interests and that these groups rely on each other, especially in terms of needs, problems and challenges for minorities like the Arabic community. It broadens the minds of the people and reveals the characteristics, images and beliefs of the Arabic culture on which society can orientate and from which it can learn. Social acceptance is generally the idea, that a society is built out of individuals that respect and consider one another as well as that everybody sees himself or herself as part of a whole and that is what the festival is promoting. Awareness needs to be raised in Australia by highlighting serious gaps in the representation of Arab Australians, by challenging entrenched attitudes and misconceptions as well as developing creative programs and providing information. Australia certainly is a far less religious country than the United States of America but some trends co-exist, referring to the influence of the media in a Christian-dominated society. Sydney is the cultural and economic heart of Australia and the Arab Film Festival has established a solid foundation of cultural exchange, which is definitely needed. No other event addresses, shows and tells stories in Australia, which present the struggles but also the beauty and diversity of the Arabic culture. With all that being said, the Arab Film Festival in Sydney supports the social acceptance of the Arabic community without a doubt. It will be interesting to see what will happen in the coming years as it takes on all Australia and all Arab and non-Arab Australians across the country and beyond.

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Erklärung zur selbstständigen Anfertigung

Hiermit erkläre ich, dass ich die Arbeit ohne fremde Hilfe selbstständig und nur unter Verwendung der angegebenen Literatur und Hilfsmittel angefertigt habe. Alle Teile, die wörtlich oder sinngemäß einer Veröffentlichung entstammen, sind als solche kenntlich gemacht.

Die Arbeit wurde noch nicht veröffentlicht oder einer anderen Prüfungsbehörde vorgelegt.

Hemsbach, 2.11.2010